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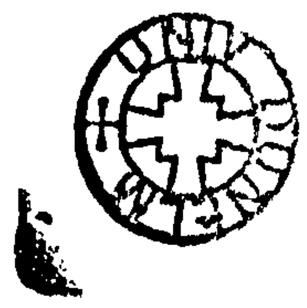
'Half-finished streets', 'Illimitable Horizons' and 'Enclosed Intimacy'

The Landscapes of Elizabeth Gaskell's Writing



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19 JUL 2000

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Durham

Department of English Studies 1999.

Frances Elizabeth Twinn **PhD 1999**

'Half-finished Streets', 'Illimitable Horizons' and 'Enclosed Intimacy'

The Landscapes of Elizabeth Gaskell's Writing

ABSTRACT

The study of Gaskell's use of place lies at the heart of the argument in this thesis. Recollections of her early years and places visited during her writing career help to create vividly evoked, topographically secure locations, which provide the structural foundations for her narratives. The major novels, the biography of Charlotte Brontë, and several short stories are used to illustrate the argument, although all her work is underpinned by a belief in the intimate connections between human beings and their environment. Chapter 1 offers an original landscape classification of her work and sets out the concepts that support the argument, e.g. Moretti's model of narrative structure and the concept of 'environmental determinism'. Chapter 2 focuses on Manchester's urban-industrial environment as portrayed realistically in *Mary Barton* and as a fictional representation in *North and South.* The argument focuses on the way in which Gaskell's familiarity with the town, and her compulsion to write about its people, combined to produce a narrative structure founded on a selective morphology of a town undergoing rapid urbanisation, manifest in its 'half-finished streets'. The physical conditions of Manchester are seen as one of the factors determining human destiny. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 deal with the works of the 'wildscape' phase of her writing. Although discussed separately, *Ruth, The Life of Charlotte Brontë* and *Sylvia's Lovers* are linked by featureless, treeless expanses of moorland and seascape with 'illimitable horizons'. Chapter 6 establishes the topographical security of Gaskell's fictionalised rural and provincial landscapes. It explores the extent to which lives are dominated by the 'enclosed intimacy' of their physical and social environment in *Wives and Daughters* and a selection of shorter fiction. In conclusion, Chapter 7 identifies Gaskell as a 'northern' novelist whose work has been found to be enriched by a belief in the close connection between character and environment.

CONTENTS

Abstract

TITLE PAGE 1

CONTENTS 2

LIST OF MAPS, DIAGRAMS AND ILLUSTRATIONS 5

DECLARATION AND STATEMENT OF COPYRIGHT 7

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 8

NOTE ON THE TEXTS 10

CHAPTER 1 **INTRODUCTION** 11

CHAPTER 2 **URBAN TOWNSCAPES AND INDUSTRIAL LANDSCAPES** 24

Introduction 24

Gaskell's Developing Relationship with Manchester 25

Narrative Perspective 32

Models of Narrative Structure 40

The Urban Geography of Manchester and its role in Gaskell's 'Industrial' Fiction 49

Literary-Spatial Relationships 83

Environmental Determinism 116

Conclusion 124

CHAPTER 3 **'WILDSCAPES'— *RUTH*** 127

Introduction to the concept of 'wildscape' 127

Introduction to *Ruth* 128

Real and Imagined Worlds – A Geography of *Ruth* 129

Ruth's Townscapes 146

'Wildscapes' in *Ruth* 160

North Wales: Changing Perspectives and Spatial Reality 161

Abermouth 177

Conclusion 189

CHAPTER 4 *THE LIFE OF CHARLOTTE BRONTË* 193

Introduction 193

Gaskell's First Impressions of Haworth 196

The Beginning of the Biography 202

Haworth 214

The Moorland Landscape: Reality, Perception and Symbolism 225

Conclusion 232

CHAPTER 5 *SYLVIA'S LOVERS* 234

The Sources of Inspiration for *Sylvia's Lovers* 237

The Structure of *Sylvia's Lovers* 243

The Spatial Spheres of Monkshaven 249

The Town 249

The Farm 266

'Wildscapes' 271

Narrative Drive and Narrative Tension: The Littoral Zone 280

Conclusion 293

CHAPTER 6 **PROVINCIAL TOWNSCAPES AND RURAL LANDSCAPES** 296

Introduction 296

Topographical Security 299

Narrative Structure 319

Gaskell's Provincial Towns 322

Country Estates 350

The Rural Landscape 364

The Metropolitan Landscape 393

Narrative Structure and Narrative Links 402

Conclusion 420

CHAPTER 7 **CONCLUSION** 424

APPENDICES 439

Appendix I Working Class Interiors in *Mary Barton* 439

Appendix II Word Counts in *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* 440

Appendix III 'Wild' Word Counts in *Sylvia's Lovers* 444

WORKS CITED 445

LIST OF MAPS, DIAGRAMS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Fig. 1.1 Time Line of Gaskell's works 16

Fig1.2 A Landscape Classification of Gaskell's Writing 17

CHAPTER 2 URBAN TOWNSCAPES AND INDUSTRIAL LANDSCAPES

Fig.2.1 Gaskell's Manchester 33

Fig.2.2 Perceptions of Milton-Northern in *North and South* 38

Fig.2.3 The Narrative Structure of *Mary Barton* 41

Fig.2.4 The Narrative Structure of *North and South* 42

Fig.2.5 Street Plan of part of Ancoats, Manchester, 1833 52

Fig.2.6 Engels' Model of Urban Structure (after Dennis) 54

Fig. 2.7 Faucher's Model of Urban Structure (after Dennis) 54

Fig.2.8 The Burgess Model of Urban Structure 55

Fig.2.9 Plan of a Closed Court 63

Fig.2.10 Court Dwelling of 1840 64

Fig.2.11 Street Plan of Operatives' Houses (after Engels) 65

Fig.2.12 A Court in Hulme 70

Fig.2.13 Map of Liverpool and its Environs 1836 101

Fig.2.14 Flow Line Diagram of Character Movements in *North and South* 110

CHAPTER 3 'WILDSCAPES' - *Ruth*

Fig.3.1 The Provincial Countryside of *Ruth* 131

Fig.3.2 North Wales, 1836 144

Fig.3.3 Ffestiniog-The Inspiration for Llan-dhu 166

Fig. 3.4 Silverdale, 1848-The Inspiration for Abermouth 182

Fig.3.5 The Abermouth Sands 185

Fig.3.6 The Narrative Structure of *Ruth* 190

CHAPTER 4 ***The Life of Charlotte Brontë***

Fig.4.1 The Road from Keighley to Haworth 210

Fig. 4.2 A 19th Century View of Haworth from the South-East 211

Fig. 4.3 The Site and Morphology of Haworth, 1853 213

Fig.4.4 Plan of Church Lane, Haworth 1853 222

Fig.4.5 Haworth Church and Parsonage, 1857 223

CHAPTER 5 Sylvia's Lovers

Fig.5.1 The Narrative Structure of *Sylvia's Lovers* 243

Fig.5.2 Charlton's Plan of the Town and Harbour of Whitby, 1778 252

Fig.5.3 The Orientation of the Monkshaven coast 253

Fig.5.4 The Townscape of Monkshaven 258

Fig.5.5 The Geography of *Sylvia's Lovers* 267

Fig.5.6 The Coastal Topography of Monkshaven 282

Fig. 5.7 Philip's Route to London 286

CHAPTER 6 RURAL LANDSCAPES AND PROVINCIAL TOWNSCAPES

Fig. 6.1 The Narrative Structure of *Wives and Daughters* 320

Fig. 6.2 The Garden Front, Capesthorne Hall 1827 358

Fig.6.3 The London of *Wives and Daughters* 394

Fig.6.4 A Tiny Scrap of Mappable Rome 415

CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION

Fig 7.1 The Spatial Distribution of Gaskell's Writing 425

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First and foremost, my thanks go to my supervisor, mentor and source of inspiration, Andrew Sanders, for his stimulating discussion, incisive observation and unfailing belief in the subject area.

A number of Gaskell scholars have helped enormously by correspondence, telephone and in conversation at meetings, lectures and conferences in London, Manchester and Knutsford. Special thanks are due to: John Chapple for sharing the fruits of his own research so selflessly, for translating a passage of commentary from French, for reading and offering advice on an early version of one section of work, and for continual encouragement; Angus Easson for information, advice and encouragement and Alan Shelston for enthusiastic support, ideas and 'nuggets' of information.

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Steven Wood, a local historian who lives in Haworth. Many of the footnotes in Chapter 4 testify to his extensive knowledge and willing assistance.

I have been impressed by the generosity in terms of verbal and documentary help I have received from Public Libraries and Record Offices around the country. Special thanks are due to Dawn Burkinshaw, formerly of the Local Studies Unit at Manchester Central Library for her help in the early days of my research.

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> 'In fact, I now think I have been everywhere where she ever lived' (*Letters* 394).

Gaskell wrote this about her research for *The Life of Charlotte Brontë.* I have visited all the locations that are discussed in this thesis. My thanks are due to my long-suffering husband who patiently discussed the accuracy of Gaskell's real and fictionalised topography. Without his constant encouragement, belief in me, computer and presentational skills, this work might never have been committed to the keyboard and paper. I owe him a debt of gratitude.

A NOTE ON THE TEXTS.

The most accessible contemporary uniform edition of Gaskell's works available is The World Classics published by Oxford University Press. As this edition contains the novels, biography and almost all the shorter fiction, it was appropriate to the requirements of this study.

The World Classics edition of *Mary Barton* is based upon the third two-volume edition of the novel published in 1849. This in turn is 'almost identical with the copyright edition' of the same year which has been 'substantially corrected.'[1] However as Easson points out; 'the only extensive re-writing of the novel was done between the first and second editions.'[2] Therefore the third edition is definitive and the current World Classics edition is a reprint of the text edited by Clement Shorter for World Classics 1906-19.[3]

The Life of Charlotte Brontë ed. by Angus Easson uses the third edition whereas Alan Shelston and Elisabeth Jay choose the first edition for their editions of the biography published by Penguin. Easson provides excellent justification for his choice of the third edition in his 'Note on the Text.' He writes: 'first and foremost, its revisions are authorial.'[4] Points relevant to the argument, which are raised by textual discrepancies, will be discussed.

Reference has been made to other editions of Gaskell's work when they are able to supplement the World Classic text and/or illuminate the argument. These are located in 'Works Cited'.

References to Gaskell's letters are taken from J.A.V.Chapple and Arthur Pollard, *The Letters of Mrs Gaskell* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1966), given by page number and can be found in parenthesis in the text.

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[1] Edgar Wright, ed. *Mary Barton* by Elizabeth Gaskell (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987) xxv.
[2] Angus Easson, ed. *Mary Barton* by Elizabeth Gaskell (Halifax: Ryburn, 1993) 22-3.
[3] Angus Easson, letter to the author, 5 Oct. 1999.
[4] Angus Easson, ed. *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996) xxvii.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

> For a right understanding of the life of my dear friend, Charlotte Brontë, it appears to me more necessary in her case than in most others, that the reader should be acquainted with the peculiar forms of population and society amidst which her earliest years were passed. (*The Life* 15)[1]

This statement, which appears at the beginning of Chapter II of Gaskell's biography following the exposition of the physical landscape surrounding Haworth, highlights the importance she attached to the role of place in the 'lived experience' of human beings.[2] By introducing the locality before the subject, she is making it clear that she believed in an inextricable link between human beings and their environment, a philosophy which, it will be argued, also underpins and informs her fiction. In fact, it is noticeable that all her major novels and many short stories commence with a real or fictional place. For instance, *North and South* opens in 'a back drawing room in Harley Street' (*NS* 5). Most readers would appreciate immediately that the address was an index of the middle-class milieu of London's West End, whereas the average reader would have been unfamiliar with the 'shores of north-east England.' (*SL* 1) Therefore the first chapter of *Sylvia's Lovers* is devoted to the geography of the fictional seaport and its environs.

Literary context

Partly as the result of these beginnings, critics and commentators have recognised the influence of Scott on Gaskell's writing. An innovator who changed the face of literature by creating real mappable topographies in his novels, he was the 'first novelist to see landscape as a literary medium as well as a pictorial one.'[3] Place was interwoven into his stories, an approach which must have appealed to Gaskell for it is evident throughout her writing. However, whereas Scott's landscapes tend to be 'real

---

[1] Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Bronte* ed. Angus Easson, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 15.

[2] John Chapple, *Elizabeth Gaskell: The Early Years* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997) 431.

[3] James Reed, *Sir Walter Scott: Landscape and Locality* (London: Athlone, 1980) 5.

territories' identifiable by real place names, Gaskell often disguises her locations. Consequently, there have been attempts to identify these fictions with varying degrees of success and usefulness.[4] The most notable of these are Chadwick's *Haunts, Homes and Stories* and Geoffrey Sharps' *Observation and Invention.* Chadwick's work was published early in the twentieth century when there was considerable interest in 'Literary Geography'.[5] Many volumes appeared between 1890 and 1930 that attempted spatial definitions and detailed expositions of landscapes associated with a particular writer; for instance, *The Hardy Country* and *Wordsworthshire.*[6] This populist interest in literary landscapes was renewed during the 1970's with two keynote studies, Daiches and Flower's Literary *Landscapes of the British Isles* and Margaret Drabble's *A Writer's Britain.* Snell, who has recently edited a scholarly volume on the regional novel, regards the latter two works as 'substantial and creditable'[7] although there are many more of the 'coffee table' variety which, although illuminating due to their glossy photographs, tend to lack intellectual rigour for they include superficial reference to the texts.[8] In a different category are those academic texts that focus on the 'regional novel'. Gaskell is usually found in these volumes because it is accepted that she wrote about real and fictional worlds which, even if not identifiable, possess a 'strong sense of local geography, topography or landscape which have distinguishing features of social relations, customs, language, dialect and

---

[4] Mrs Ellis H. Chadwick, *Mrs Gaskell, Haunts, Homes and Stories* (London: Pitman, 1913) and J.G. Sharps, *Mrs Gaskell's Observation and Invention* (Fontwell: Linden Press, 1970).

[5] William Sharp, *Literary Geography* (London: Pall Mall, 1907). K.D.M. Snell, ed. *The Regional Novel in Britain and Ireland, 1800-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998). Snell includes a comprehensive literature survey of the work that focuses on literary-place associations. The interested reader needs look no further to explore the field.

[6] C.G.Harper, *The Hardy Country* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1904). Eric Robertson, *Wordsworthshire* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1911).

[7] Snell 20.

[8] David Daiches and John Flower, *Literary Landscapes of the British Isles* (London and New York: Paddington Press, 1979); Margaret Drabble, *A Writer's Britain* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979). A more recent volume is that of Malcolm Bradbury, ed. *The Atlas of Literature* (London: De Agostini, 1996). It is possible to collect shelves full of books about the associations writers have with particular landscapes and how those landscapes have inspired their work. They are too numerous to mention. Volumes which have a slightly different focus are those such as Gillian Tindall's *Countries of the Mind* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1991) which considers the meaning of place to writers rather than focusing purely on the inspirational landscapes.

culture.'[9] Some, like *Sylvia's Lovers,* have a regional focus and an historical dimension.'[10]

Most academic commentators classify her early novels as 'social reform' (Tillotson), 'Condition of England' (Sanders) or 'protest' (Uglow).[11] However, it should be noted that this early work did not appear in a 'literary vacuum.'[12] Gaskell was part of a group of women who wrote about the urban-industrial environment early in the 1840's.[13] However, she was unique because her narratives were 'topographically secure'[14] whereas theirs were not.[15]

Recently, critics rooted in gender politics have been attracted to Gaskell as an example of a writer who, through her life and 'social reform' fiction has emerged from the private, enclosed, domestic world of domesticity into the public realm. Although some employ geographical language in their argument, they are more concerned with the socio-behavioural and gender-political rather than the spatial aspects of her work.[16]

As a writer who spans spatial divides and literary genres Gaskell has been difficult to categorise. However, none of her work appears in a 'topographical vacuum'. A number of real and contrasting places make an appearance in her stories like

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[9] Snell, 1.

[10] Andrew Sanders, *The Victorian Historical Novel* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1979).

[11] Kathleen Tillotson, *The Novels of the 1840's* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1954); Andrew Sanders, *A Short History of English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994); Uglow, xix.

[12] Monica Fryckstedt, 'The Early Industrial Novel: *Mary Barton* and its predecessors,' *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 63 (1980-1): 30.

[13] Angus Easson, *Elizabeth Gaskell* (London: Routledge, 1979) 62.

[14] I was first introduced to this term by Andrew Sanders during a supervision on 16 September 1998. The term will be used throughout the text.

[15] Notable members of the group of women were: Frances Trollope, *The Adventures of Michael Armstrong: The Factory Boy* (London,1840,) the setting of which, Easson considers to be Derbyshire; Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna , *Helen Fleetwod* (London, 1841). The novel is set in M— which is assumed to be Manchester. Elizabeth Stone was a Manchester resident but her evocation of place is more reminiscent of rural Lancashire than urban Manchester. Elizabeth Stone, *William Langshawe:The Cotton Lord* vol. I (London, 1842) 14-15.

[16] These studies, many of which are American, focus on her first three works especially the urban environments of *Mary Barton* and *North and South.* One of the leading proponents of this critical approach is Deborah Epstein Nord, *Walking the Victorian Streets: Women, Representation and the City* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1995). Deirdre d'Albertis, *Dissembling Fictions: Elizabeth Gaskell and the Victorian Social Text* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1997). This criticism focuses upon Gaskell's writing.

Manchester and Haworth, London and North Wales, as well as fictional places such as the urban-industrial landscape of Milton-Northern, the shorescapes of Abermouth and Monkshaven, and provincial towns of Hollingford, Helstone, Hamley, Duncombe, Cranford, Fordham and Eccleston. This long list of which many, but not all, are located in the North of England implies that her writing encompasses a diversity of place and landscape. As Keith points out it is not possible to identify 'Elizabeth Gaskell country' on the map of the British Isles[17] as one might recognise 'Catherine Cookson Country' or 'Lorna Doone country,' 'Barsetshire' or 'Wessex,' for she did not use a single geographical area as the unifying principle of her work.

This thesis proposes an innovative classification firmly rooted in the landscapes and localities of her novels will form the framework of the argument.

Classification of Gaskell's works.

Despite the apparent diversity of place in Gaskell's writing, her work is located in only three major landscape types. These have been designated: Urban townscapes and Industrial landscapes; 'Wildscapes'; and Provincial townscapes and Rural landscapes. (An introduction to the concept of 'wildscape' will be included at the beginning of Chapter 3). Included in the classification are the novels, her sole biography, and a selection of the longer short stories and novellas, like *Cousin Phillis* and *My Lady Ludlow.* The selection, which is inevitably subjective, has been made because these works illustrate the arguments that will be advanced in these pages. The landscape that dominates the work is the criterion used to place the work in the classification.

(a) Urban Townscapes and Industrial Landscapes (1845-1854)[18] *Libbie Marsh's Three Eras* (1847); *Mary Barton* (1848); *North and South* (1854).

(b) 'Wildscapes' (1854-1863) which includes the treeless moorlands of *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857); the seascapes of *Sylvia's Lovers* (1863) and *The Sexton's*

---

17 W.J.Keith, *Regions of the Imagination* (Toronto: Toronto UP, 1988) 57.

18 The dates are based upon date of publication of the work apart from the commencement of the 'wildscape' phase that dates from the beginning of Gaskell's research for *The Life.*

Hero (1847). *Ruth* (1853) and *The Well of Pen-Morfa* (1850) are located in 'wild Wales'(*Letters* 21).

(c) Provincial Townscapes and Rural Landscapes (1860-1865) *Cranford* (1853); *Cousin Phillis* (1864); *A Dark Night's Work* (1863); *Mr Harrison's Confessions* (1851) and *Wives and Daughters* (1865).

Once organised it becomes obvious that the classification also possesses a chronological dimension revealing that her work falls into three landscape phases. A time line, fig.1.1, illustrates this point.

Written over a period of twenty years the three diverse landscape types originate from Gaskell's 'lived experience.'[19] The universal piece of advice which is offered to aspiring novelists is 'to write about what you know' and this is precisely what Gaskell did initially, although later in her writing career she moved into unfamiliar landscapes which necessitated exploration, familiarisation and research before she felt she could write convincingly. Beginning with the urban-industrial landscapes of *Libbie Marsh's Three Eras, Mary Barton,* and *North and South,* she then became attracted by the treeless moorlands that she encountered whilst writing *The Life of Charlotte Brontë.* This wildscape recurs again in *Sylvia's Lovers* so that the years from 1854 to 1863 can be seen as Gaskell's 'wildscape' phase. It should be noted that her visit to Whitby in October 1859 saw the end of this phase as she had gathered the information she needed for *Sylvia's Lovers*, and had only to write the novel. Finally her writing career culminated with *Cousin Phillis* and *Wives and Daughters* which were located in much-loved rural and provincial environments.

---

[19] Chapple, *The Early Years* 431. Ann Banfield, 'The Influence of Place: Jane Austen and the Novel,' *Jane Austen: Real and Imagined Worlds,* ed. Oliver McDonagh (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1991) 35.

Time Scale	Urban & Industrial	Wildscapes	Provincial & Rural	Other Events
1865			*Wives & Daughters* *Hollingford*	
1864			*Cousin Phillis* *Heathbridge*	
1863		*Sylvia's Lovers* *Monkshaven*	*A Dark Night's Work* *Hamley*	
1862				
1861				writing of Sylvia's
1860				Lovers
1859				Visit to Whitby
1858			*My Lady Ludlow* *Hanbury Court*	
1857		*The Life of CB* Haworth		
1856				
1855	*North & South* *Milton-Northern*			
1854				
1853		*Ruth* *Abermouth & Llan-dhu*	*Cranford* *Cranford*	
1852				Serialisation of Cranford
1851			*Mr Harrison's Confessions* *Duncombe*	
1850		*Well of Pen-Morfa* Pen-Morfa		
1849				
1848	*Mary Barton* Manchester			
1847	*Libbie Marsh* Manchester	*Sexton's Hero* Morecambe Bay		
1846				
1845				starts to write Mary Barton

Fig 1.1 Time Line of Gaskell's Works

Limits of the Classification

The three-fold division of landscape is an oversimplification because it does not recognise the variety of landscapes which may appear in a single work. An alternative method of displaying the classification is shown in Fig. 1.2 below. It is adapted from

Moretti[20] who used schematic diagrams as tools to describe narrative structure in his study of the European novel.

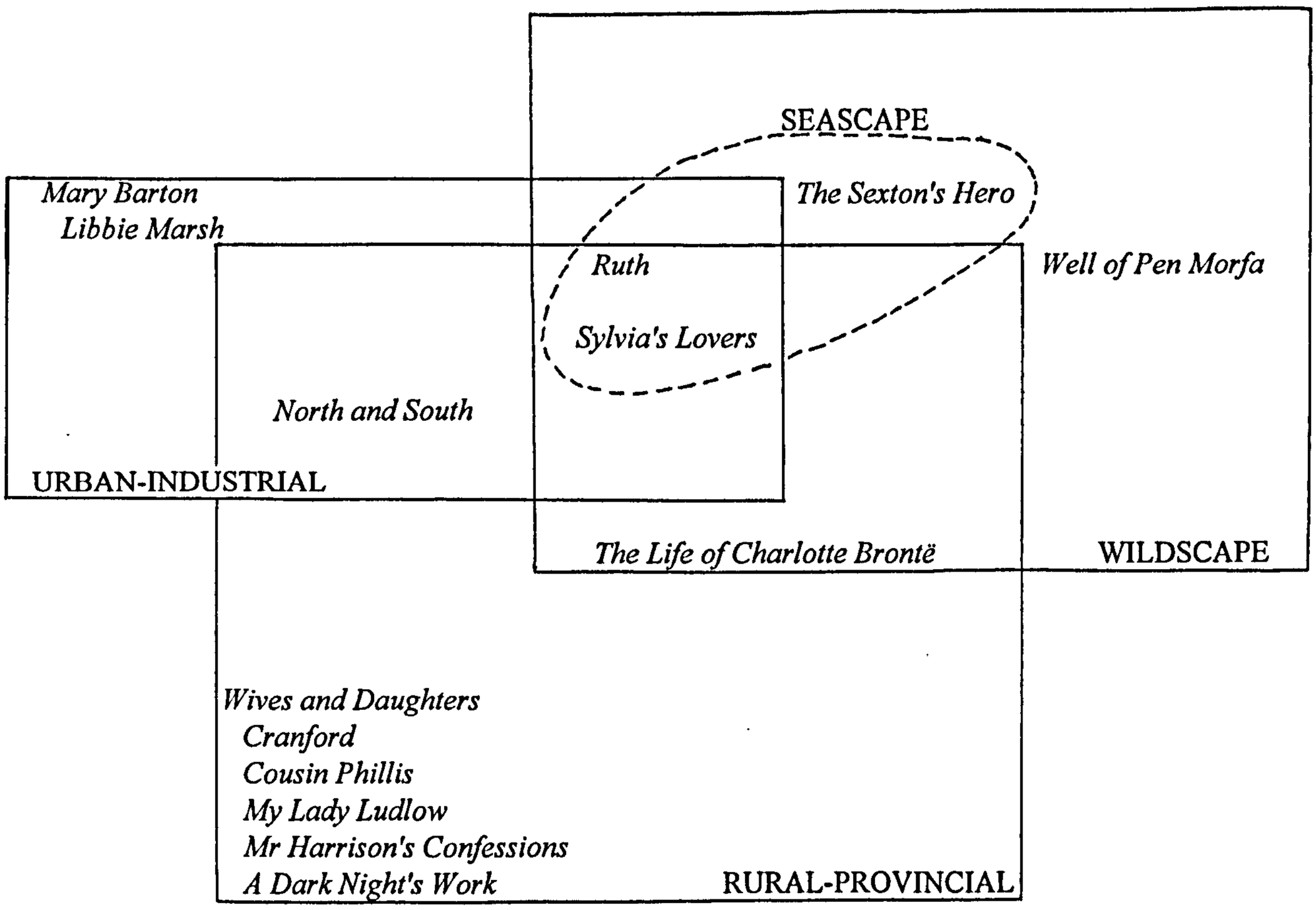

Fig. 1.2 A Landscape Classification of Gaskell's writing

The diagram usefully acknowledges that, whilst some works are deeply rooted within a specific locality like *Sylvia's Lovers* and *Mary Barton,* others, for instance, *Ruth* and *North and South* appear at the heart of the schematic diagram because their narratives move across the boundaries of contrasting landscapes. In *Ruth,* Gaskell's second 'social reform' novel, the principal theme of the 'fallen woman' takes place across a wide geographical area as the relationship between Ruth and Bellingham develops, disintegrates and irrevocably fails. However, the land and shore-scapes can be classified as 'wild' so it is appropriate to consider *Ruth* as a representative of Gaskell's

---

[20] Franco Moretti, *An Atlas of the European Novel* (London: Verso, 1998) 131.

'wildscape' phase. *North and South* will be considered within the discussion of urban-industrial landscapes as Gaskell attempts to portray both the point of view of industrialist and worker in Milton-Northern. It is also the location in which the theme of 'north' versus 'south' is played out and it possesses a spatial reality that is lacking in Helstone.

Whilst *Wives and Daughters* provides an identifiable if highly selective and partial map of London, the narrative moves there so fleetingly that it must fall into the rural-provincial category. The narrative of *A Dark Night's Work* moves to Rome and London with Eleanor but, as the greatest proportion of the novel is located in Hamley, a small provincial town, it falls most logically into the final category.

The Sexton's Hero and The Well of Pen-Morfa are notable for their topographical security and geographical accuracy, therefore no detective work is necessary to establish the extent to which Gaskell portrayed the environmental realities of either Morecambe Bay or the Welsh landscape of Pen-Morfa. For this reason and because they do not fit chronologically into what has been defined as Gaskell's 'wildscape' phase, they have not been included in this study. However, the significance of their literary-spatial relationships would make an excellent subject for a paper in the future.[21]

Although the classification encapsulates the broad chronological organisation of Gaskell's work, it ignores her preferences and motivation. Torn between innate desire and moral compulsion, 'she paid her debt to society'[22] and by allowing her conscience to rule at the outset of her career she produced the social-reform novels of *Mary Barton, Ruth* and *North and South.* The novels, which sprang from her desire to write about much-loved rural landscapes, were left until later. However, as Chapple has rightly observed, these springs of innate desire kept bubbling to the surface throughout her writing years so that *Cranford* was sandwiched between *Mary Barton*

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[21] If the reader wishes to see near perfect examples of Gaskell's technique of using accurate topography as the structural basis of the narrative he/she need look no further.

[22] Keith 58.

and *Ruth*, and *My Lady Ludlow* which has a rural-provincial location, pops up during the 'wildscape' phase.[23]

It should also be noted that within much of her writing there is a distinct 'northern-ness' and provincialism. This 'spirit of place'[24] which was so characteristic of Scott's writing will be identified by means of non-spatial distinguishing features or 'indices' such as clothing, dialect, food and customs[25] during the course of the forthcoming discussion.

Place as the central organising principle of Gaskell's work

Before there is any discussion of the role of place in the construction of the literary aspects of the works, it is considered necessary to establish the geography and topography of Gaskell's novels. Much groundwork has been done, especially by Angus Easson, Alan Shelston and Shirley Foster. The 'notes' in their editions of Gaskell's work have provided an excellent springboard for this research and the dialogue to be found in these pages.[26] Having scrutinised and analysed Gaskell's methods of construction and portrayal of place, it is intended to establish the topographical security and socio-economic realism of her environments.

Although there has been relatively little academic study of place as the central organising principle of her work two landmark studies have appeared in the last ten years. Francesco Marroni's monograph, the thesis of which is, that 'topology (space organisation) plays a central role in Mrs Gaskell's fiction' was published ten years ago in Italian, has yet to be officially translated into English.[27] In an unpublished letter to the author, he summarises his thesis thus,

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[23] Chapple, *The Early Years* 432.

[24] Reed 17.

[25] Scott's novels are rich in non-spatial details so the reader is constantly aware of what the characters wore and ate and how they spoke.

[26] Easson and Shelston each have edited several works. Reference to them may be found in the bibliography. Shirley Foster, ed. *Sylvia's Lovers* by Elizabeth Gaskell (London: Penguin, 1996).

[27] Francesco Marroni, *La Fabbrica nella Valle: Saggio sulla narrativa di Elzabeth Gaskell, (The factory in the valley: An essay on the narrative of Elizabeth Gaskell)* Bari: Adriatica Editrice, 1987. I am grateful to Liliana Smith for translating parts of Marroni's work for me.

> A significant index of her space-strategy can be usefully found in *Lois the Witch* where a precise use of space can be seen in the coincidence between Lois' destiny and her 'lived spaces', (ocean, pier shore, in her uncle's house and the forest).[28]

It is an exploration of Gaskell's 'space-strategy' which is the subject of this thesis.

More recently, Franco Moretti has considered the 'European novel' from a spatial viewpoint but although he makes no specific reference to Gaskell's works, his model of narrative structure developed in relation to the metropolitan landscapes of Dickens' London and Balzac's Paris will be adapted as the basis for discussion of Gaskell's 'space strategy.' For each of the major novels, a schematic diagram inspired by those that Moretti produced for literary Paris and London[29] will be produced to illustrate the spatial relationships which form the structure and links in Gaskell's writing and to initiate discussion of the organic and dynamic relationship between narrative and place.

The diagrams will demonstrate that Gaskell's work is constructed upon three, or sometimes four spatial foci. Although they may be some distance apart, they overlap through the relationships between the characters. The spatial foci range from three or four diverse landscapes in the case of *Ruth* and *Sylvia's Lovers* for instance, to the interior domestic space of a single location. For instance, the structural units of *Mary Barton* and *Wives and Daughters* are the homes of the principal characters. *North and South,* as its title implies, offers a duality of construction. The narrative moves between Helstone, London and Milton-Northern principally, and Oxford briefly. However, superimposed upon that triangular dynamic is another generated within Milton-Northern itself as the narrative moves between the homes of the Hales, Thornton and Higgins as the result of their socio-economic links. It will be argued that the distances between the places are useful to the narrator for they generate the narrative drive of the stories as the characters move between these foci. Via character movement, Gaskell is able to control narrative pace, introduce narrative pause and

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[28] Marroni, unpublished letter to the author, 20 Apr. 1997.
[29] Moretti, 111; 112; 131-134.

occasionally create narrative chasms. It will be argued that Gaskell's narratives are built upon and grow out of the landscapes, townscapes and seascapes. Through the construction of their physical and social geography and their history, diverse places are interwoven into the text.

Place as the unifying principle of Gaskell's work

Just because it is not possible to draw a map of 'Gaskell country' does not deny the presence of a unifying principle in her work. As Keith recognised her work is underpinned by her belief in 'the intimate connection between human beings and their environment'[30] Unlike Keith, many commentators, writing on novelists whose work is firmly rooted in a 'precisely delineated locality,'[31] tend to take a deterministic view of the role of place in the novel. Barrell suggests that: 'the plots and narrative structures of Hardy's novels might have been to a degree determined by their various settings.'[32] Snell endorses this approach by asserting:

> Many regional novels use region or place in crucially important ways, to explain or interpret, to develop characterisation to indicate how character grows out of certain occupied localities, how people respond to particular environments, to evoke good and evil through landscape contrasts, or to intensify mood or convey a sense of irony as is so often the case in a novel like *Tess of the D'Urbervilles'* (and, it will be argued, Gaskell's writings).[33]

Reed and Sanders take a similar view of Scott and his novels.[34] Moretti's study of the European novel is underpinned by 'environmental determinism', as is clear from his statement that: 'what happens depends a lot on where it happens' i.e. 'that each space determines or at least encourages its own story.'[35]

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[30] Keith, 60. Hughes suggests that this belief would have had its origin in Gaskell's Unitarianism. Kathryn Hughes, *George Eliot: The Last Victorian* (London: Fourth Estate, 1998) 46.

[31] Reed 6.

[32] John Barrell, 'Geographies of Thomas Hardy's Wessex,' *The Regional Novel in Britain and Ireland 1800-1990* ed. K.D.M.Snell (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998) 99.

[33] Snell 35.

[34] Reed 3. Sanders writes: 'The novels present character as being shaped and determined by environment, an environment which is as much local as it is temporal and as subject to geography as it is to history.' Sanders could have been writing about Gaskell. Sanders, *The Short Oxford History of English Literature* 376.

[35] Moretti 100.

Environmental Determinism

This concept, which had not been recognised during Gaskell's lifetime, was formalised by geographers at the end of the nineteenth century, although the principle that natural conditions influence human activities, the struggle for survival and, behaviour, was implicit in Darwinian theory. However, 'crude environmental determinism quickly fell into disrepute' for it was recognised that conditions were 'far too complex for determinate answers to be expected in all cases.'[36] It is suggested that Gaskell recognised this complexity and incorporated into her narratives several interactive controlling factors in the equation of human destiny including the environment. The others are character, circumstance,chance, and, in some novels, the expiation of sin. Throughout the discussion of each novel, consideration will be given to these controlling factors in order to assess the extent to which environmental determinism dominates the equation. For the purposes of this study, 'environment' is taken to encompass both the natural landscape and the prevailing socio-economic conditions.

Snell quotes the view that there has been: 'a wholesale retreat from geography and history into the domain of pure "textuality" in which the principle of indeterminacy smothers the possibility of social and political,' and it may be added, spatial, 'significance for literature.' [37] It is the intention of this piece of work to demonstrate that the significance of space is woven into Gaskell's texts and that place plays a deterministic role in Gaskell's writing.

The pattern of discussion will remain substantially the same throughout the thesis. The starting point of each chapter will establish the extent to which her 'lived experience' inspired the landscapes and the way in which Gaskell 'manipulated',[38] 'amalgamated' and 'selected' from her familiarity with land-and-townscapes to create

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[36] Brian Goodall, *Dictionary of Human Geography* (London: Penguin, 1987) 155-6.

[37] Snell, 16.

[38] Barrell uses this term when he is describing the process Hardy used to re-create Dorset as 'Wessex' 99.

either a real or imaginative, but also unique, topography and 'sense of place'.[39] Then spatial-literary relationships will be discussed before considering the balance of controlling factors in the destinies of the characters. Throughout illustrative material is included to describe, analyse, exemplify, and it is hoped, illuminate the argument.

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[39] John Barrell, *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place 1730-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1972). Chapple defines 'a sense of place' thus: 'It is a blend; usually though not invariably, an actual location perceived through the senses and the initial impressions are at once, and then in lengthening memory, transformed by our thoughts and emotions.' John Chapple, 'A Sense of Place: Elizabeth Gaskell and the Brontës,' *Brontë Society Transactions* 20 (1992): 314.

CHAPTER 2

URBAN TOWNSCAPES AND INDUSTRIAL LANDSCAPES

INTRODUCTION

Manchester was unfamiliar and alien to Gaskell when she married and arrived to live in Dover Street in 1832. Unfamiliarity with this intensely urban-industrial landscape resulted in its denial, as she stressed the rurality of her homes and longed constantly for the peace and solitude of the countryside. The prevailing humid atmosphere and smog-shortened days were never to her liking, so throughout her marriage she escaped from the town whenever opportunities arose.

Denial was replaced by ambivalence as familiarity with the environment increased over the years. However, within the constraints of the environment to which she had committed herself, Gaskell took control of her own life and destiny and felt morally compelled to use her immediate surroundings as the framework for two of her major works of fiction as well as a number of short stories. In order to explore the significance of the urban-industrial environment in her fiction this section of the work will focus attention on *Mary Barton* and *North and South* with brief reference to the short story, *Libbie Marsh's Three Eras.*[1] In order to build up the argument some attention will be given to Gaskell's experience and relationship with Manchester. Then consideration will be given to theoretical models of narrative structure followed by a discussion of Gaskell's geography of Manchester in the 1830's and 1840's as related to these models. Having established the urban geography of Gaskell's industrial fiction, the discussion will centre upon the extent to which the urban-industrial environment underpins the structure and narrative drive of the fiction, and determines human destiny. To do this Marroni's conviction, 'that topology (space organization) plays a central role in Mrs Gaskell's fiction'[2] will be incorporated into

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[1]Elizabeth Gaskell, 'Libbie Marsh's Three Eras,' *A Dark Night's Work,* ed. by Suzanne Lewis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) 167-183.

[2] Marroni, letter to the author, 20 Apr. 1997.

Moretti's thesis that '*each space determines, or at least encourages its own kind of story'*, in other words, '*what* happens depends a lot on *where* it happens.'[3]

GASKELL'S DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIP WITH MANCHESTER

Gaskell's decision to marry a fellow Unitarian who had become minister-in-waiting at the prestigious Cross Street chapel in Manchester determined where she was to spend most the rest of her life. She moved from the familiar and much-loved country town of Knutsford in which she had been brought up to the unfamiliar and alien borders of Manchester. During her childhood years of the first quarter of the nineteenth century, Knutsford was a small country market town serving its rural locality. Whilst Gaskell would have been aware of the rapidly growing manufacturing town, fifteen miles to the north[4] she appears to have had little direct contact with Manchester prior to 1831. In fact Chapple prefaces his account of this period of her life leading up to her marriage with the words, 'Until recently nothing was known about Elizabeth's visits to Manchester.'[5] For decades, Chadwick has convinced readers and commentators alike that Elizabeth met her husband in the home of the Rev. John Robberds. Chadwick thought his home was located in the 'leafy green charm and rustic solitude'[6] of Greenheys, a pleasant suburb on the south-western edge of Manchester which was inhabited by an illustrious population of merchants and 'literati'. Chapple's recent research seems to endorse the fact that whilst Elizabeth met William Gaskell in the Robberds home, at the time, the family were living much

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[3] Franco Moretti, *An Atlas of the European Novel* (London: Verso, 1998) 70.

[4] Peter Keating, ed. *Cranford* by Elizabeth Gaskell (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976) 339. Chapple says 'about sixteen miles.' Chapple, *The Early Years* 55. The Knutsford Heritage Centre has confirmed the distance. Their opinion is that this is a reasonable estimate for the time, although, of course, distance depends on route.

[5] John Chapple, *Elizabeth Gaskell: The Early Years.* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997) 397.

[6] The quotation comes from De Quincey's description of his home. 'Greenheys Fields' *Gaskell Society Newsletter* Aug. (1897): 12. John Mortimer, 'Concerning the *Mary Barton* Fields' *Manchester Quarterly* Jan. (1911): 5.

closer to the centre of Manchester in Grosvenor Square.[7] It is difficult to tell how much direct experience she had of the urban townscape but, as John Robberds was the Minister of Cross Street Chapel and her fiancé was to become his assistant and then supersede him, it seems highly likely that she accompanied the family to church on Sundays. A habitual shopper, she may also have taken advantage of the high order retail functions offered by this rapidly growing urban centre.[8]

Despite her limited acquaintance with Manchester, it must be remembered that, given the relative difficulties of travel up until the advent of the railway, Elizabeth Stevenson was a well travelled young lady by this time. She had become familiar with the 'wild' places of North Wales, had spent time in the society of her sophisticated Holland cousins in London and, during the two years prior to her engagement, had lived with the Turner family in the commercial industrialised town of Newcastle upon-Tyne.[9] So it is not as if she was thrust into Manchester with absolutely no experience of places beyond Knutsford. However, she went into denial about the environment into which she had committed herself as soon as she arrived in Dover Street after her marriage.[10] Descriptions of all three of her Manchester homes are

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[7] Chapple, *The Early Years,* 397. Chapple recounts the recent discovery of the Herford diaries that have produced greater biographical accuracy about these details which enable stronger biographical-fictional links to be forged. Although not explicit about the length of Gaskell's visit to the Robberds, the implication of the evidence seems to suggest that Gaskell stayed with them in Grosvenor Square. The area 'was intended as the centrepiece of a new and exclusive suburb-Chorlton-on-Medlock' and the Robberds had moved there in the mid-1820's.

[8] Gaskell's letter indicates a predilection for shopping. Often she discusses purchases either bought or planned for either, herself, or more often, for her daughters. Shopping is a significant activity in both *Mary Barton* and *North and South* for it symbolises socio-economic status, generates narrative drive and provides a strategic link in the relationship between Margaret and Thornton as he carries fruit to the ailing Mrs Hale. Christine Mannix in an unpublished essay for an M.A. course in Victorian Studies writes:

> It is no surprise that Mrs Gaskell should choose symbols of food and shops, as tangible examples of wealth or lack of it, for the Industrial Revolution witnessed considerable changes in the distributive system with shops becoming increasingly more important supply outlets throughout the country by 1830.

Christine Mannix, 'Manchester: Exploring and Charting the City of *Mary Barton,*' essay, Birkbeck Coll. n.d. 30.

[9] S. Middlebrook, *Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Its Growth and Achievement* (Newcastle: Kemsley House, 1950).

[10] Shelston describes the house 'as one of a row of new, if modest residential dwellings.' "I would fain be in the country" Elizabeth Gaskell and Manchester' *Portico Library Monograph* 4 Mar. (1996): 3.

defined in terms of their rurality which according to her own self-confessed spatial definition was '5 miles from the least approach to a town' (*Letters* 5). On that basis none of her homes qualify as rural. Admittedly as urban sprawl took hold and 'the town marched into the surrounding fields'[11] so the Gaskells moved to try to maintain their position on the edge of the built environment.[12] It is perhaps understandable, given her life-long love of rural landscapes, that she located herself in relation to the rural-urban margin whilst simultaneously ignoring the existence of the urban area on her doorstep. Her initial response to the location of her first home was lukewarm as she described Manchester as 'very countrified,'[13] which conveys an element of an attempt to find the best to say of the environment. Ten years later her second home lay precisely 'a mile and a half from the *very* middle of Manchester' and was 'the last house countrywards of the interminably long' (Rumford)street' (*Letters* 81), which was actually only 200 yards further out than Dover Street. However, it had an outlook into fields from some of the windows, 'not very pretty or rural fields it must be owned, but in which the children can see milked cows and hay made in the summertime' (*Letters* 81). In this description, although it is clear that Gaskell had turned her back on Manchester, there is only grudging acknowledgement of the presence of their 'rural' surroundings and thinly disguised contempt for its quality. Of course, she was judging by the yardstick of her beloved Sandlebridge, the Holland family farm in Knutsford. That home lay, 'in the very depth of the country' (*Letters* 5) with 'pretty fields & woods all round' (*Letters* 6); the epitome of a rural landscape in Gaskell's terms.

However, it would be naive to suggest that her definition of 'rural' is merely a spatial concept. If it were, Greenheys fields which appear at the beginning of *Mary Barton*

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[11] Chapple makes reference to 'Cruikshank's satirical engraving' that is reproduced in H.J.Dyos and Michael Wolff, *The Victorian City: Images and Realities* vol. II (London: Routledge, 1973) opposite 464. **Urban sprawl** is the unplanned outward growth of the built environment. It is a process that has continued into the twentieth century in the form of ribbon development.

[12] Gérin describes Gaskell's homes in Manchester as 'always a little beyond the smoke barrier of the manufacturing areas of the town.' Winifred Gérin, *Elizabeth Gaskell* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976) 51.

[13] Uglow 84.

would not qualify, for although she describes them as 'thoroughly rural' (*MB* 1), they lie only one and half miles from the centre of Manchester. To Gaskell however, the term 'rural' encapsulates sights and sounds and smells of the environment as well as its spatial context. The Manchester operatives in Greenheys fields on that May afternoon *see*: 'an old black and white farm-house, with its rambling outbuildings,' and *smell* the garden with its 'medley of fragrant old-fashioned herbs and wild luxuriance of flowers', and *hear* 'the delicious sounds of rural life: the lowing of cattle, the milkmaid's call, the clatter and cackle of poultry in the old farm-yards' (my italics)(*MB* 1-2). Like these folk in Greenheys fields, Gaskell experienced the same assault on her senses at Sandlebridge: 'Fancy me sitting in an old fashioned parlour, [...] with casement window opening into a sunny court all filled with flowers which *scent* the air [...] the *song* of birds, [...] the *hum* of insects the *lowing* of cattle [...] the busy *hum* of bees' (my italics) (*Letters* 5-6). Sensual detail characterises all Gaskell's descriptions of landscape and townscape whether real or fictional, as will be seen in the analysis of her novels.

The move in 1850 to the larger, detached house which stood 'in semi-rural isolation'[14] in Plymouth Grove only two miles from Manchester, was necessitated by the size of the family[15] and provided Gaskell with the opportunity to re-create, if not a replica of her beloved rural environment of Sandlebridge, then something very much akin to 'its happy circumstance' (*Letters* 6). In the seclusion of its walled garden, she propagated flowers and grew vegetables and on an adjacent plot of land she kept a cow, a pig and ducks. By November 1851 she was able to write excitedly to Eliza Fox that she thought her 'proper vocation was farming' (*Letters* 171).[16]

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[14] Marion Leslie, 'Mrs Gaskell's house and its Memories.' *Woman at Home,* June (1897) 761.

[15] Shelston, 'I would fain be in the country' 3.

[16] Gaskell admits that the soil was the inevitable clay that underlay the Chorlton-on-Medlock area of the town. John Hatton's report of 1854 drew attention to the wet cellars of the area and related the problem of drainage to the underlying impermeable clay. John Hatton, 'A Lecture on the Sanitary Condition of Chorlton-on-Medlock' (Manchester, 1854). The foundations of homes are important to Gaskell because of the correlation between the underlying geology and health. The Hale's house stands on gravel that aids drainage and is therefore considered healthy (*NS* 64). Hulme was built on gravels. The same is true of the Gibson's house in Hollingford and Gibson remarks that it would be a suitable

Her longing for the countryside never left her as frequent comments in her letters demonstrate even though she was never to live in a rural environment again after her marriage. Four years after moving to Manchester, she wrote to Mary Howitt, 'that she longed to be off into the country when the first Spring days come' (*Letters* 14) and in 1850, she tells Lady Kay-Shuttleworth that, 'I would fain be in the country' (*Letters* 139). Her preference for the country was also partly due to several aspects of the Manchester environment to which she never really adjusted. Its townscape appeared ugly and was noisy, congested and polluted, that is, totally devoid of the beauty and deep solitude she encountered in rural landscapes (*Letters* 86).[17] Noted for its humidity, the 'cold clammy atmosphere' (*Letters* 86) and smog-shortened days of the Manchester climate adversely affected Gaskell's health and spirits. [18] Neither did she ever become reconciled to the physical contact and confrontation encountered on the congested streets of Manchester.

However, despite these environmental disadvantages, she was aware that having married William Gaskell her destiny lay in Manchester. Although there was an acceptance that 'her lot lay on the borders of a great manufacturing town', she struck out independently to be the arbiter of her own destiny (*Letters* 14). As the wife of a significant clergyman in the town she had responsibilities but she was reluctant to be shackled to the expectations of his influential Unitarian congregation.

> She no sooner settled in Manchester than she steadily and consistently objected to her time being considered as belonging in any way to her husband's congregation for the purposes of congregational visiting and to

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place for Cynthia's cousin to recuperate after her illness, *WD* 500. The Brontë Parsonage was notorious for its insanitary site so close to the graveyard. Charlotte Brontë clearly liked the house and described its location in Manchester. 'She lives in a large, cheerful airy house, quite out of the Manchester smoke' Charlotte Brontë to George Smith 1 July 1851. T.J.Wise and J.A.Symington, *The Brontës: Their Lives, Friendships and Correspondence* vol. III (Oxford: Shakespeare Head, 1932) 255.

[17] In this letter she says that Manchester was a town 'with no grace or beauty in it.' Gaskell wrote that she was 'so much better for Knutsford-partly air, partly quiet and partly by being by myself for a good piece of every day' (*Letters* 168).

[18] Gaskell's letters are littered with references to the adverse effect of the weather and atmospheric conditions on her moods and well-being. *Letters* 62; 139; 597; 598; 607.

> being looked to for that leadership in congregational work which is too often expected of 'a minister's wife'.[19]

Like her protagonists who attempted to control their own fates, 'what she did was of her own choice and desire.'[20] Although her preference was for Sunday School teaching, Bell, who has collated 'Manchester' evidence from Gaskell's letters (*Letters* 549), suggests that she was 'very involved in charitable works, but so far as we can judge, hers was a very independent and intensely personal approach.'[21] Bell's paper and a study of the letters themselves reveal the activities of a lively, gregarious, independent-minded, middle class woman who had a large circle of friends, went to church, taught in the Sunday school, visited the theatre, attended concerts, entertained the 'literati', shopped, and knew which factories to recommend to visitors to the town (*Letters* 729). Gaskell created the opportunities to become acquainted and familiar with the town and its people and it is this first hand experience of Manchester which underpins her fiction set within urban-industrial landscapes. All commentators remark upon this informing principle found in *Mary Barton, North and South* and short stories like *Lizzie Leigh* and *Libbie Marsh* but few scratch beneath the surface of her experience to discover how her experience was acquired. In fact Gaskell herself provides the clue. In the Preface to *Mary Barton,* she describes her physical contact with Manchester's inhabitants as she was 'elbowed' in its streets. Manchester was a congested, crowded town, especially at the change of shifts in the factories and at the time she was writing many of its narrow, unpaved muddy streets had very narrow footways. It would have been impossible to walk along the streets without involuntarily bumping into fellow inhabitants who were rushing to and from work.[22] Gaskell faced this hazard on a daily basis because she walked everywhere in her early

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[19] A. Cobden Smith, 'Mrs Gaskell and Lower Mosley Street,' *Sunday School Quarterly* 11. 4 Jan. (1911): 158.

[20] A. Cobden Smith 160.

[21] Margaret Bell, 'Elizabeth Gaskell and Manchester,' *Trans. of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society,* 81, (1982): 98.

[22] Messinger quotes a 1809 pamphlet which describes the narrow congested streets in which there is much elbowing and pushing so that 'a person will be pushed all ways [...] off the flags'. Gary S. Messinger, *Manchester in the Victorian Age,* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985) 12.

years in the town.[23] Unlike the wealthy mill-owners, Messrs. Hunter and Carson of her first novel and Mr Thornton in *North and South,* the Gaskells were unable to afford a carriage until 1850 when they moved to Plymouth Grove. Without the protective cocoon of a wheeled vehicle she was able to experience directly the sights, sounds and smells and physical contact beyond the principal thoroughfares of the urban environment.[24] References in letters indicate that she was always on the move. She walked to church, although she usually had a lift home, 'plodged' through the muddy streets to the Portico to secure the second instalment of *Amos Barton* (*Letters* 592), and 'set off on a walking-expedition' (*Letters* 92) to visit Samuel Bamford who lived at Blackley which was six miles away. Distance did not deter her, neither did unsociable hours. She and William walked home across town from a christening at the Bradfords at Seedley beyond Pendleton, a distance of three miles one way, in the early hours of the morning (*Letters* 18).

Gaskell was gregarious and her 'social visiting' would not have been confined to one social group. Whilst she went to visit friends, many of whom lived in middle-class Greenheys and Ardwick, (which were located on the urban periphery), her parochial visiting brought her into contact with artisans and their homes. However, there is very little specific evidence about exactly where she went.[25] Once, 'to exorcise the fidgets,

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[23] Few commentators specify Gaskell's mode of transport around the town. A telephone conversation with Jenny Uglow in February 1994 confirmed that Gaskell would have walked everywhere in her early years in the town although in her biography she fails to mention it specifically. Bell mentions William Gaskell walking 'smartly.' Bell 94.

[24] Engels, in his 'magnum opus' refers to the social segregation, 'misery and grime' concealed by the major arteries accessible by coaches and carriages. Genrally the middle classes would not have seen the worst excesses of social deprivation in Manchester. Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845 London: Penguin, 1987) 86.

[25] R. Wade, *A Sketch of the Origin and History of Lower Mosley Street Day and Sunday Schools* (Manchester, 1898), L Burney *Cross Street Chapel Schools 1734-42* (Didsbury: Eric Morten, 1977) Uglow suggests that her charitable work brought her face to face with abused and exploited women. 319. Margaret Bell also deals with this subject comprehensively. Not only did Gaskell teach in Sunday School but the girls visited her at home. *Letters* 163. Gaskell writes to Maria James on 3 December 1855 describing a typical day balanced between Sunday School teaching and visiting. There was a ladies committee responsible for the welfare of the girls but there is no evidence that Gaskell was a member of this committee but she would have visited absentee pupils and therefore seen their homes. The cost of Sunday School was one penny per week that meant that the pupils were of the artisan class rather than the very poor.

she proposed a 'long tramp to the workhouse' (*Letters* 218). Whilst it is possible that she was referring to the Manchester Workhouse located at Strangeways on the northern side of the town about two miles away, it seems more likely that she meant the local Chorlton-on-Medlock workhouse situated at the corner of Leaf Street and Stretford New Road. (See Fig. 2.1) To reach this destination she would have had to walk through Chorlton-on-Medlock and the densely populated streets to the west of Oxford Road. Jenkinson Street, which is the only street reference to the location of Gaskell's parochial visits that seems to exist, lies in this area not far from her home. (See Fig.2.1)[26] All this experience of the town on foot would have given her a working knowledge of the geography of Manchester that would prove to be the structural foundations of her first novel.

NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Gaskell began to write thirteen years after arriving in Manchester, by which time she would have been familiar with the town. Out of her familiarity there had developed affection for Manchester, which is evident in both her letters and her fiction. In a letter to Charles Eliot Norton of 1857, Gaskell describes Manchester affectionately as 'dear, old dull ugly smoky grim grey Manchester' (*Letters* 489). Libbie Marsh sees the town in similar terms ten years earlier from the perspective of the grassy knoll at Dunham Massey: 'Manchester,– ugly, smoky Manchester, dear, busy, earnest, noble-working Manchester' (*LM* 183). However, this familiarity sat uneasily with Gaskell's aesthetic and climatic reservations about its physical environment and as can be seen from the above references resulted in an ambivalence about the town. Negative epithets outweigh the positive as affection is encapsulated in only one word, 'dear' whereas

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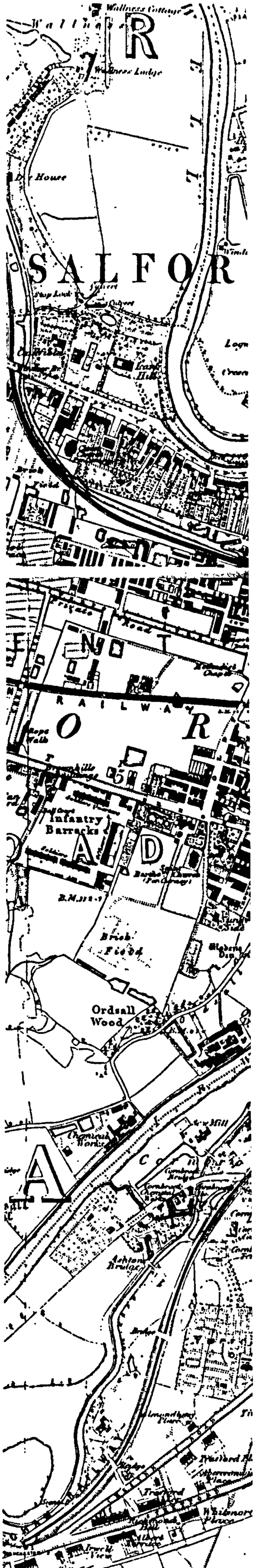
[26] Mat Hompes, 'Mrs Gaskell and her social work among the poor,' *The Inquirer* Oct. 8 (1910): 656. Gaskell also worked for the Salford and District Provident Society that operated extensively in the poorest parts of Manchester, for instance, Deansgate, Ancoats and London Road. Each designated district had a paid worker and a number of voluntary visitors, one of which was Mrs Gaskell according to Irvine. Hugh Colly Irvine, *The Old DPS: A Short History of Charitable work in Manchester and Salford 1833-1933* (Manchester: The report of the DPS of Manchester and Salford, 1933). Parochial visiting would have been done on foot.



MANCHESTER LOCATIONS
IN GASKELL'S INDUSTRIAL WRITINGS

1. THE 'OUD CHURCH (*MB)*
2. MARKET (*NEW*) STREET (*NS*)
3. LONDON ROAD (*MB*)
4. OXFORD ROAD (*MB*)
5. DEANSGATE (*MB*)
6. EXCHANGE (*NS*)
7. HULME (*CRAMPTON*) (*MB* and *NS*)
8. POSSIBLE SITE OF HALE'S RENTED HOME
9. HULME CHURCH (*MB*)
10. LITTLE IRELAND (*MB* and *NS*)
11. LONDON ROAD AREA - *BARTON* HOME (*MB*)
12. 14, BARBER STREET - *ALICE WILSON'S* CELLAR (*MB*)
13. BERRY STREET – *DAVENPORT* CELLAR (*MB*)
14. ANCOATS – *WILSON* HOME (*MB*)
15. PETER STREET-*ESTHER'S LODGING HOUSE*
16. 145, NICHOLAS STREET, ANGEL MEADOW – *ESTHER'S* ADDRESS (*MB*)
17. No 2—COURT, *ALBERMARLE* STREET (*LM*)
18. CARSON HOME (*MB*)
19. GREENHEYS (*MB*)
20. KNOTT MILL, BRIDGEWATER CANAL (*NS* and *LM*)
21. RIVER IRWELL (*NS*)

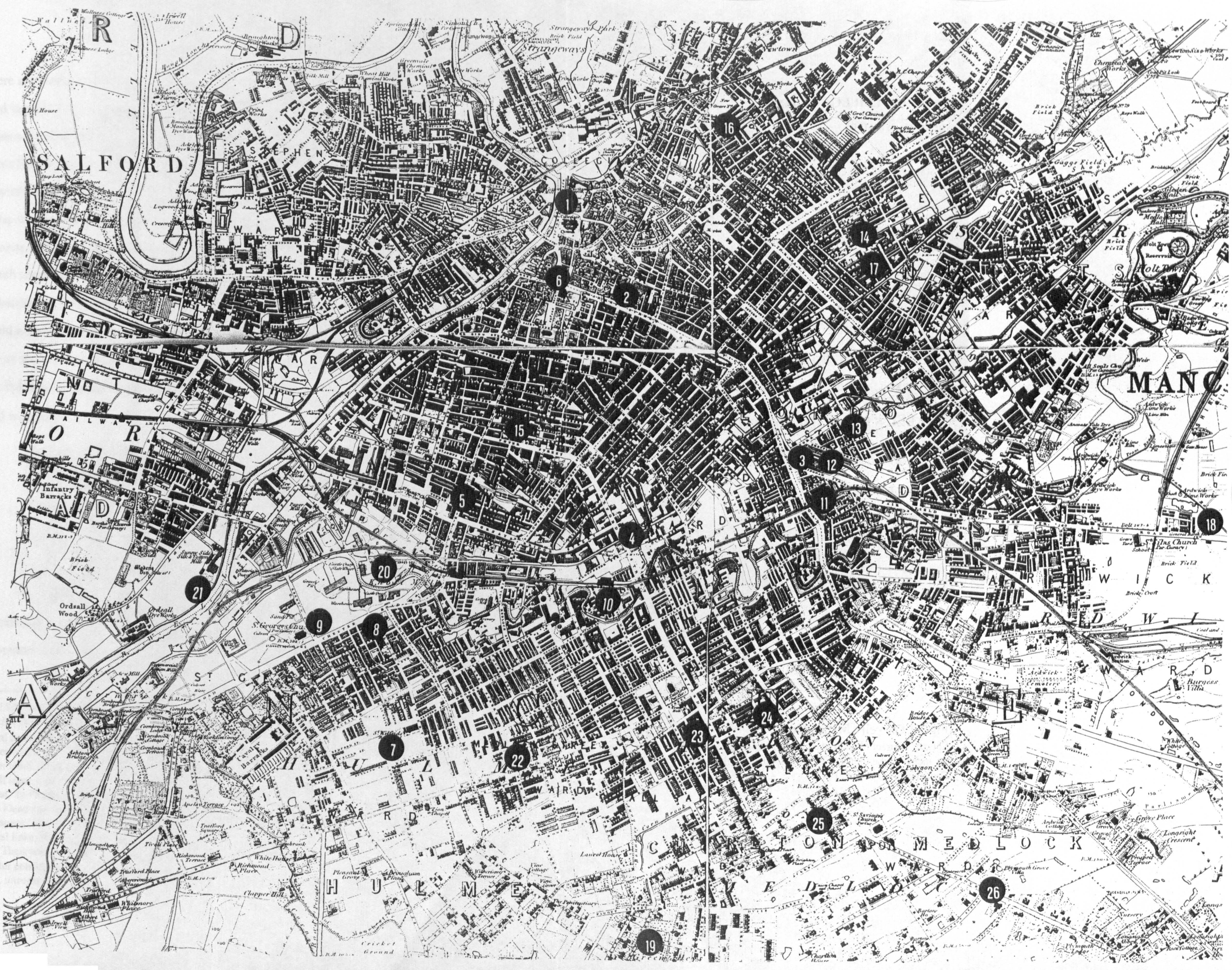
GASKELL'S PAROCHIAL VISITING

22. CHORLTON-ON-MEDLOCK WORKHOUSE
21 JENKINSON STREET

GASKELL'S HOMES

22 121 RUMFORD STREET
23 14 DOVER STREET
24 42 PLYMOUTH GROVE

Fig.2.1 Gaskell's Manchester
Source: Extract of and reduced from *Manchester*, map six inches to the mile 1st Edition (Southampton: Ordnance Map Office, 1848)


SALFORD
S. STEPHEN
WARD
COLLEGE
Strangeways
Strangeways Park
Brick Field
Gaggs Field
Gaggs Field School
Holt Town
Holt Town Reservoir
Infantry Barracks
Ordsall Wood
Ordsall Dye Works
St. Georges Church
St. Georges Cemetery
Cavalry Barracks
Ashton Bridge
Ashton Terrace
Trafford Square
Trafford Place
Richmond Terrace
Richmond Place
Whitmore Place
Clapper Hill
Pleasant Grove
Laurel House
Vine Cottage
Vine Grove
Penitentiary
Cricket Ground
Cemetery
Ardwick Dye Works
Ardwick Lime Works
Ardwick Cemetery
All Souls Church
St. Silas Church
Brick Croft
Burgess Villa
Bridge Bank
Polygon
St. Saviours Church
Grove Place
Longsight Crescent
Presbyterian Chapel
Plymouth Grove
Plymouth Lodge
Nursery
Northern House
Laurel House
Vine Cottage
Vine Grove
Penitentiary
Cricket Ground
Cemetery
Ardwick Dye Works
Ardwick Lime Works
Ardwick Cemetery
All Souls Church
St. Silas Church
Brick Croft
Burgess Villa
Bridge Bank
Polygon
St. Saviours Church
Grove Place
Longsight Crescent
Presbyterian Chapel
Plymouth Grove
Plymouth Lodge
Nursery
Northern House
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there are between three and six detractors in these descriptions, such as 'ugly,' 'old' and 'smoky'. Gaskell's ambivalence to Manchester causes her to make quite dogmatic statements like 'I believe I *am* Medieval,-and that I am *un*Manchester' (*Letters* 492). This love-hate relationship has been widely acknowledged because it informs the narrative perspective of her 'industrial fiction.'[27]

The compulsion to write her first major novel originated in Manchester's congested streets.[28] She jettisoned a story set on the Yorkshire borders in favour of telling the truth about the interaction of human beings with the urban-industrial environment of Manchester.[29] The 'romance' that she detected in the lives of 'those who daily' passed held a fascination for her. She was first and foremost an artist rather than a polemicist so as she was at pains to point out, the novel was more a tragic poem than a discourse on Political Economy because it focused on the *lives* of individual working class men and women.

> I had always felt a *deep sympathy* with the care-worn men [...] tossed to and fro by circumstances, [...] I saw that they were *sore* and *irritable* against the rich, the even tenor of whose seemingly *happy* lives appeared to increase the *anguish* caused by the lottery-like nature of their own [...] .
> The more I reflected in this *unhappy* state of things between those so bound to each other by common interests, as the employers and the employed must ever be, the more anxious I became to give some utterance to the *agony* which from time to time, *convulses* this dumb people; the *agony of suffering* without the *sympathy* of the *happy* [...] . (my italics) (*MB* xxxvi)

This passage, suffused with the emotional responses of Manchester's working class, demonstrates Gaskell's empathy with them. There is also an acknowledgement of

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[27] Bell 93. Angus Easson 'Elizabeth Gaskell and the Novel of Local Pride,' *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 67 2 (1984-5) 691. Shelston, 'I would fain be in the country' 2.

[28] Nord considers that the physical contact was the starting point of her fiction. This commentator is a member of the feminist critical canon who has written extensively on Gaskell's urban fiction. Deborah Epstein Nord, *Walking the Victorian Streets* (Cornell: Cornell UP, 1995) 143. Their thesis is that Gaskell represents the emergence of women from the domestic into the 'public realm'. Barbara Leah Harman, 'In Promiscuous Company: Female Public Appearance in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South' Victorian Studies* Spring (1988) 358. Gaskell is seen as a representative of the 'sexualisation of urban space.' Nord 176. Although these writers do not textualise at the expense of the biographical-fictional links, they focus on the socio-behavioural rather than the topographical aspects of urban space. Their work has been considered at length and is used where appropriate.

[29] Foster considers that this Yorkshire tale may have come to fruition as *Sylvia's Lovers.* Shirley Foster, introduction, *Sylvia's Lovers* by Elizabeth Gaskell (London: Penguin, 1996) viii.

Gaskell's belief that their lives were inextricably linked to the environment in which they lived. Therefore it is not surprising that Preston describes the narrative perspective of *Mary Barton* as 'unquestionably Mancunian' and 'narrated from deep within her experience of the town.'[30]

As Easson observes, Gaskell is unique for she:

> was the only novelist who actually in an industrial as opposed to an urban area [...] . She had connections here that gave her sensory and imaginative perceptions about the industrial revolution to which writers like Dickens and Disraeli did not have access.[31]

He considers that Gaskell is 'importantly different' from Dickens and Disraeli, a view shared by Preston.[32] Both Dickens and Disraeli wrote without Gaskell's intimate knowledge and experience; their views of the industrial landscape were often long distance set-piece descriptions expressed in the language of rhetoric and hyperbole. Both commentators allude to the connection between biography and fiction endorsing the view that familiarity with a place influences the viewpoint of the writer and hence the perspective of the narrative.

Having written *Mary Barton* from the narrow perspective of the working classes, Gaskell anticipated criticism and went to tremendous lengths to remain anonymous partly because she was so sensitive to criticism and partly perhaps because she had no wish to compromise William's standing with the 'millocracy'[33] many of whom were Unitarians and members of his congregation. Despite her determination to remain anonymous she had under-estimated the spatial clues at the beginning of the novel. It was the accuracy of the portrayal of a real place and the 'small details which can only be observed from personal observation'[34] which revealed Gaskell's identity. The writer had to be someone intimately familiar with the town:

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30 Peter Preston, 'Manchester and Milton-Northern,' *Writing the City: Eden Babylon and the New Jerusalem* (London: Routledge, 1994) 56; 35.

31 Easson, 'Novel of Local Pride' 693.

32 Preston 37.

33 Uglow 87.

34 'Maria Edgeworth to Mary Holland 27 December 1848' Angus Easson, *The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1991) 89.

> What do you think! I'm positive *Mary Barton, a Story of Manchester Life* is by Mrs Gaskell! I got hold of it last night going to bed and *knew by the first few words* (my italics) it was hers-about Green Heys Fields and the stile she was describing to Kate and me the other day; [...] . The folks here know all about it I am sure-they all turned so silent when I began to talk about it at breakfast time, and Mrs Gaskell suddenly popped down under the table to look for something which I am sure wasn't there.'[35]

Emily Winkworth, familiar with Manchester and friend of Mrs Gaskell, could not fail to recognise the location.[36] The topographical reality, which characterises the early pages of the novel, is maintained throughout *Mary Barton* as Gaskell attempts to portray the plight of the working classes in a dynamic, physical and socio-economic environment. Whilst her intention is to tell the truth, the picture is tinged with her own perceptions. Mary, leaving Manchester for the first time in her life, as she looks back on Manchester experiences a pang of homesickness: 'The very journey itself seemed to her a matter of wonder. She had a back seat and looked towards the factory chimneys and the cloud of smoke which hovers over Manchester with a feeling akin to Heimweh' (*MB* 333). Here, behind the mask of the German word for homesickness, Gaskell is able to disguise her own feelings of affection for the town, feelings engendered by her familiarity with Manchester which, far from breeding contempt, generated a sense of pride in the town. This underlying pride in Manchester is at the heart of Easson's argument about her special relationship with Manchester and her unique qualities as a novelist, a thesis which is expounded in his paper about *Mary*

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35 *Memorials of Two Sisters: Susanna and Catherine Winkworth* ed. Margaret J. Shaen (London: Longmans, 1908) 31.

36 When the Winkworth Family moved to Manchester they took a house in Oxford Road. The description makes it clear that its proximity to Greenheys would have enabled the sisters to have been familiar with the area and it is likely that they took walks in the fields. Certainly they would have visited friends in Greenheys. Susanna Winkworth described the house thus: 'it was a little above All Saints Church. Our row had longish gardens behind which opened at the back into a street leading to Greenheys fields.' The Winkworths developed a close lasting friendship with Elizabeth Gaskell. They saw each other almost every day at one stage, William gave them lessons and they shared charitable work through the District Provident Society. 'The Gaskells are so friendly with us nowadays, it is quite delightful' [...]. The Gaskells we come across what with lessons and meeting each other out and so on most days in the week'. Susanna Winkworth, *Letters and Memorials of Catherine Winkworth* vol. I (Clifton: E.Austin, 1883) 130; 132.

Barton as a 'Novel of Local Pride'. He highlights the admiration and pride with which Gaskell perceives the town but confines his comments to her first novel.

Whilst her desire to write about the urban-industrial environment was not diminished six years after the completion of *Mary Barton,* her approach in *North and South* was somewhat different as Manchester becomes fictionalised to Milton-Northern. The town is seen through the contrasting perceptual filters of familiarity and unfamiliarity as Gaskell tries to counterbalance the much criticised narrative perspective of Mary *Barton.* Within the pages of the novel are two groups of characters, those who are familiar with the northern town and those who are not. Interestingly there appears to be no simple correlation between familiarity and liking. However, the perception of Milton-Northern remains consistent throughout. There are seven adjectives used to describe Manchester, 'smoky,' 'dirty,' 'horrid,' 'crowded,' 'noisy,' 'busy' and 'bustling.' Of these, four are most frequently used are 'smoky,' 'crowded,' 'busy' and 'bustling.' It might be assumed that those unfamiliar with Manchester also express distaste or even dislike for the place but in fact, although outsiders, Aunt Shaw and Mrs Hale are the most vociferous in their negative responses. The indigenous Fanny Thornton also actively dislikes Manchester, marries, and leaves the town to marry and live in a small manufacturing town beyond. Mr Thornton and his mother are more concerned to promote an economic rather than a physical image of the town: therefore their perceptions are dominated by Manchester's unique commercial success, which in Mrs Thornton's case is veneered with pride. She is the embodiment of Gaskell's pride in Manchester's industrial achievements. Fanny says of her: 'Mamma has never been to London herself, [...] She is very proud of Milton; dirty smoky place as I feel it to be' (*NS* 97), and Mrs Thornton herself expresses pride when she asks Margaret if she has seen 'any of our factories, our magnificent warehouses.' To Margaret's rather negative response she continues,

> I merely thought, that as strangers newly come to reside in a town which has risen to eminence in the country, from the character and progress of its peculiar business, you might have cared to visit some of the places where it is carried on; places unique in the kingdom [...] . (*NS* 98)

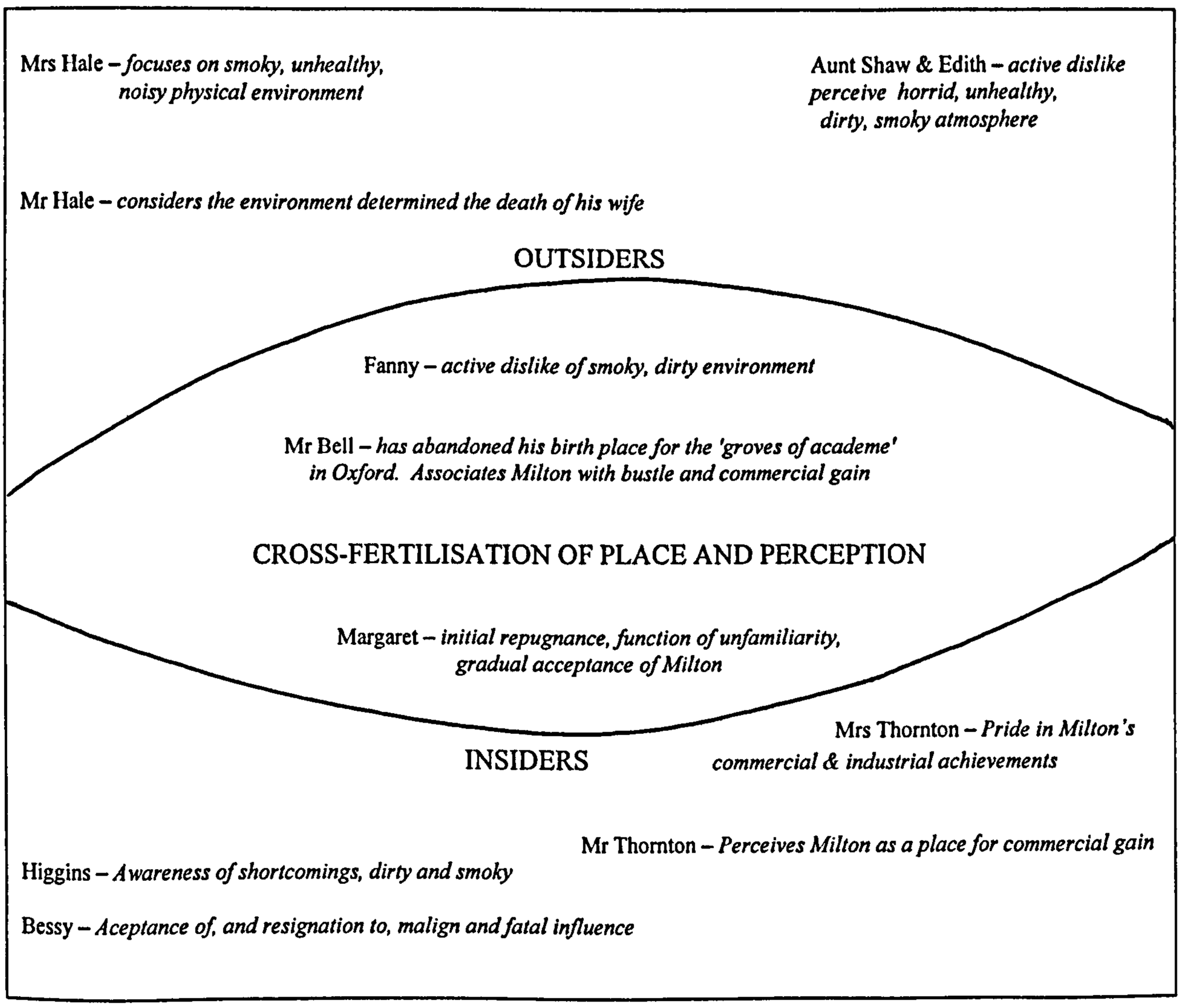

Fig 2.2 Perceptions of Milton-Northern in *North and South*

These perceptions are interwoven into the narrative fabric of the novel through action, dialogue and plot as they reveal character, determine destiny and express theme. Whilst the narrative perspective of her second novel appears more objective and the place less topographically secure, it can be argued that both novels are written from 'deep within the experience of the town.'[37] Some commentators, however, like to see Gaskell as an outsider. Uglow writes: 'it is noticeable that the city as a whole is nearly always approached – by reader and narrator, both literally and metaphorically –

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[37] Preston 35.

from the outside'. Recognising that Gaskell was initially a stranger to Manchester, Vicinus considers that she was 'an acute and sympathetic outsider' and Shelston agrees with both women in describing her as a novelist of 'borders and boundaries' although all three commentators acknowledge that Gaskell writes from personal knowledge of Manchester.[38] It seems to this author that Gaskell maintains an apparently marginal position for two reasons which have everything to do with her creativity and nothing to do with spatial or emotional relationship to Manchester. In both novels, the protagonists move into the town from outside. The Bartons and Wilsons walk home from their afternoon out in Greenheys at the beginning of *Mary Barton* whereas Margaret and her father arrive in Milton-Northern by train and 'were whirled and drove' to the town centre. In both novels character movement engenders narrative drive and enfolds the reader into the action as they share the experiences of the urban-industrial environment. This technique comes from the pen of a writer who is deeply rooted within Manchester and deeply committed to its inhabitants.

It has been established in the foregoing discussion that narrative perspective varies according to the writer's familiarity with the place in which the narrative is located and that perspective is manifest in the manner in which the place is presented to the reader. Both biographers and critics in seeking to establish the biographical-fictional links in Gaskell's work have focused largely upon the presentational methodology of Manchester in her novels. However, by taking into account both Gaskell's compulsion to write about the lives of the working classes together with her familiarity with Manchester, it seems possible to hypothesise that the urban space of Manchester was more than just a setting. In fact it provided the structural foundation for her fiction. The texts are constructed on, and move forward, within the inhabited urban space of Manchester because it is the framework of the lives of her characters. Therefore, it would seem that their spatial context is the ideal and entirely appropriate

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[38] Uglow, 85. Martha Vicinus, 'Literary Voices of an Industrial Town: Manchester 1810-70,' *The Victorian City: Images and Realities,* ed. H.J. Dyos and M. Wolff vol. II (London: Routledge, 1973) 748. Shelston, 'I would fain be in the country' 2. Physically Gaskell remains on the borders of Manchester as her home keeps pace with its progressive outward growth.

construct for her novels; a context which is also entirely appropriate to Gaskell's philosophy that people and places are inextricably linked. In Gaskell's fiction the urban-industrial landscape of Manchester becomes the spatial manifestation of her compulsion and familiarity.

In his study of the 'European novel' Moretti provided a model of narrative structure which he applied to the novels of Dickens and Balzac. It has been adapted as a starting point for analysis of the nature of Gaskell's Manchester, her use of urban space, and the extent to which her philosophy of the link between human beings and their environment is deterministic and underpins her fiction.

MODELS OF NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

The titles and sub-title of Gaskell's 'industrial novels', *Mary Barton: A Tale of Manchester Life* and *North and South* encapsulate their subject matter.[39] If as Moretti hypotheses, 'Specific stories are the product of specific places,'[40] then Gaskell's novels can be assumed to be constructed on the place and places in which the drama is enacted. Such deterministic philosophy underpins Moretti's attempt to produce a geography of European literature. The conceptual narrative models provided for the urban novels of Dickens and Balzac are portrayed as schematic diagrams which seem to be ideally suited to Gaskell's Manchester. Therefore they have been adapted, modified and applied to demonstrate the structural importance of the town in *Mary Barton* and *North and South.* The intention is to take the argument beyond that of discussion of Gaskell's presentation of Manchester to a recognition and acceptance that the physical and socio-economic characteristics of the particular urban space provide the structural framework that underpins these 'northern' narratives. (See figs.2.3 and 2.4). However it must be recognised that they are no more than conceptual devices used to highlight, in a static and simplified manner, the

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[39] Easson, introduction, *Mary Barton* 12.
[40] Moretti 100.

fundamental structural control of urban space and its relationship to plot and character.

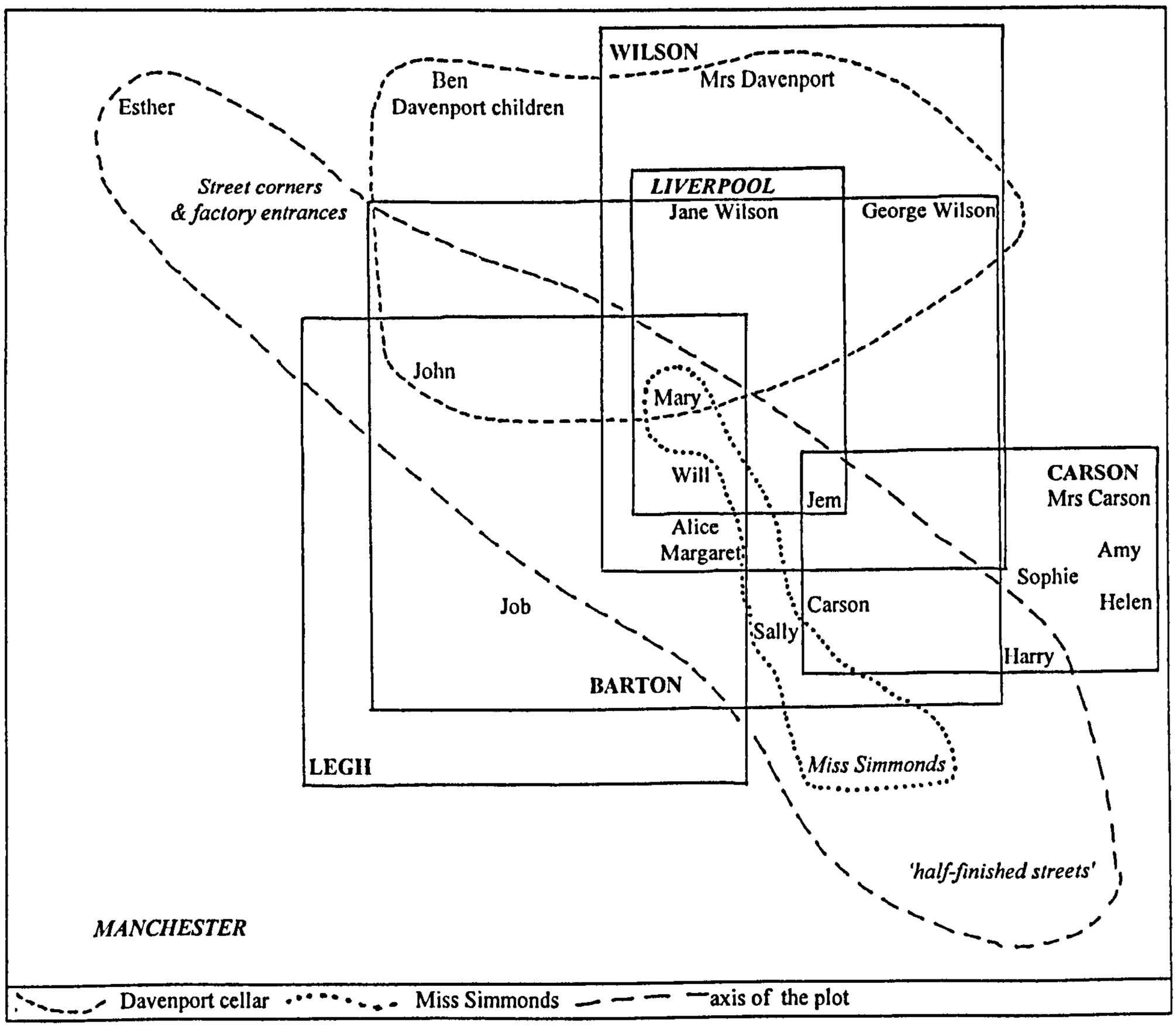

Figure 2.3 THE NARRATIVE STRUCTURE OF *MARY BARTON*

Application of the models to *Mary Barton* and *North and South.*

Manchester's urban space consists of two elements; houses and streets. Shelston[41] considers that the framework for the story of Mary Barton is the family, therefore it seems possible to argue that the family is a social unit and that its spatial manifestation is the home.[42] The domestic spheres of the novel overlap not only due

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[41] Alan Shelston, 'Family Values: Friedrich Engels and Elizabeth Gaskell' *Transactions of the Lancs.and Ches. Antiquarian Society* 90 (1994): 16.

[42] Moretti identifies homes as the structural units of *Little Dorrit* and *Bleak House.* Moretti 132-3.

to family relationships, but also through friendships and the economic relationships that typify a town undergoing rapid industrialisation in which an socio-economic hierarchy develops as the inevitable concomitant of a capitalist system. As will be

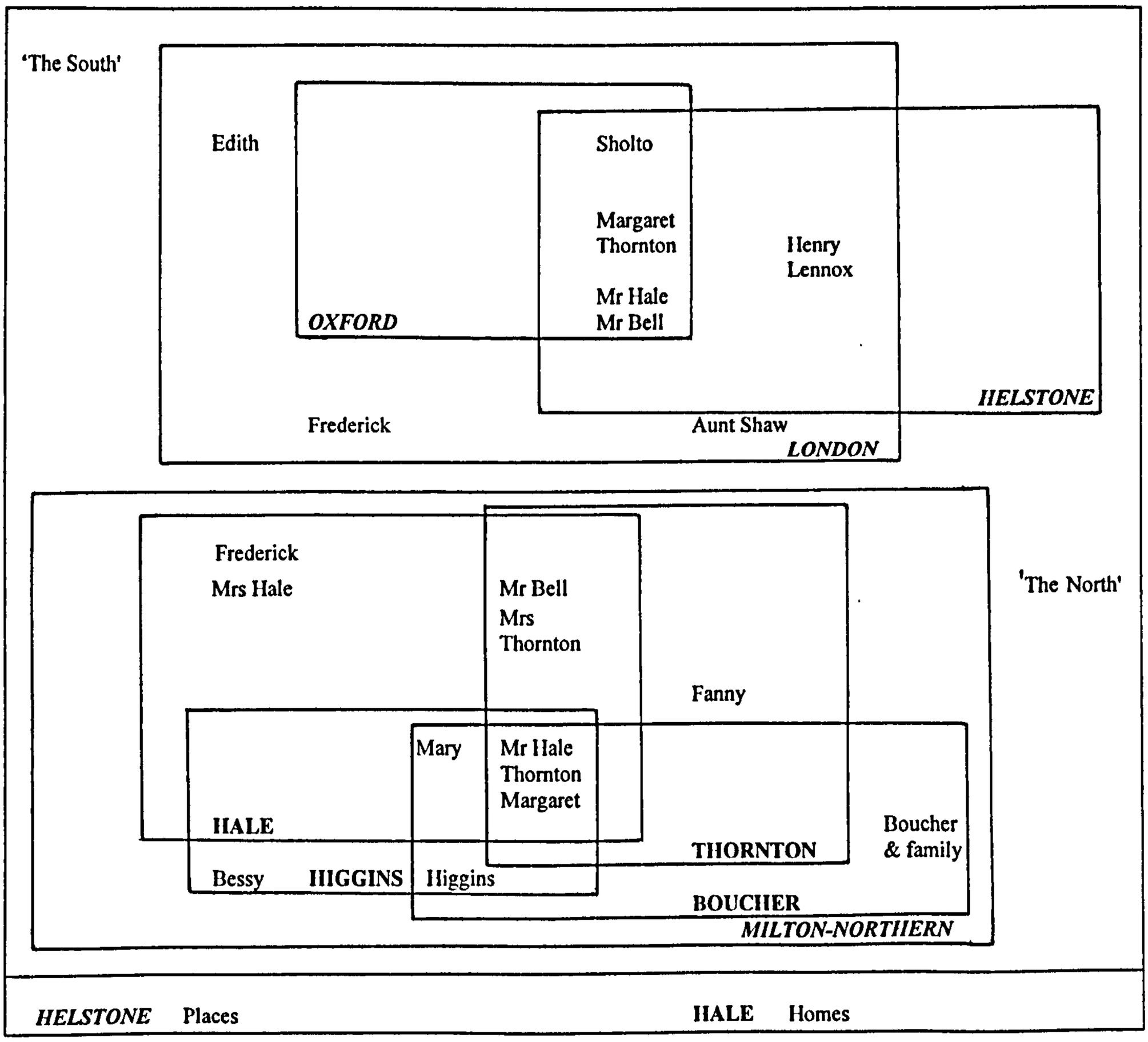

Figure 2.4 THE NARRATIVE STRUCTURE OF *NORTH AND SOUTH*

seen, the class divisions that emerge have their spatial manifestation in patterns of residential segregation. These patterns will be discussed in detail in a later section of the chapter.[43] The socio-economic hierarchy that emerged in Manchester during the Industrial Revolution was manifest spatially in terms of recognisable functional zones. Although Gaskell's homes are only conceptually represented in the diagram,

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[43]Martin Hewitt, *The Emergence of Stability in the Industrial City: Manchester 1832-67* (Aldershot: Scolar, 1996) 54.

She provides either a specific address or a specific location within the urban area. As a result, *Mary Barton* possesses what Shelston implied is a 'street geography'[44] which means that the homes can be spatially plotted and subsequently correlated with a particular functional zone. The socio-economic nuances then can be identified and their literary significance discussed. The spatial distribution of these homes also determines the need for movement between them, which in turn generates the narrative drive of the story. Therefore the streets act as the conduits through which the characters move, meet and interact.

It is clear that the central characters of the novels appear at the heart of the diagrams because they visit and/or inhabit a range of spatial sub-divisions and, therefore, move through the streets that link these different spheres. For instance, Mary, Jem and Will lie at the heart of *Mary Barton,* and Margaret and Thornton feature in both plot strands in *North and South* just as Eugene, Mortimer and Rokesmith, 'their mutual friend' are the central triumvirate of Dickens' novel.[45] However, by the end of *Mary Barton,* Manchester is empty just as the centre of London is empty of Dickens' characters. Moretti, struck by the empty centre of Dickens' novels, argues 'everyone runs away' because 'London has no gravitational force' and he suggests that characters like Fanny and Arthur (*Little Dorrit)* are 'in London' but not 'of it.'[46] Gaskell's characters are certainly 'of Manchester' but the novel is resolved by an empty, abandoned spatial heartland because its events and its environmental conditions determine their lives. The causes are either death of the characters during the course of the story or the departure of protagonists, Jem and Mary, who cannot be reconciled to Manchester or its population after the allegations made about Jem's role in Carson's murder. In her second Manchester novel, Gaskell allowed an atmosphere of reconciliation to permeate Milton-Northern so that the spatial manifestation of the novel's resolution lay in union of the 'north' with the 'south', that is, marriage

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[44] Shelston, 'I would fain be in the country' 5.
[45] Moretti 131.
[46] Moretti 120; 122.

between Margaret and Thornton. The consequence was an inhabited urban-industrial heart as Margaret abandoned a romanticised rural Helstone to live, presumably, 'happily ever after' in Milton-Northern.

With one exception, the position of the characters within the diagram of *Mary Barton*'s narrative structure indicates their location within the urban space of Manchester, for they inhabit the overlapping domestic spaces at the heart of the story. However, Esther as a prostitute, and therefore social outcast, is 'geographically marginalised'[47] and inhabits the streets of the town. D'Albertis draws attention to the image of Esther as a butterfly hovering at the edge of these domestic interiors and the diagram that indicates her peripheral location is both representative and realistic.[48] She takes her argument further and contends that Gaskell 'mapped urban space through the twinned perspectives of Esther' and herself as narrator, 'as well as through the formal fusion of melodrama and social realism.'[49] However, as D'Albertis fails to acknowledge Esther's address it must be assumed that her reference to 'Gaskell's mapping of urban space through Esther' is a euphemism for a social rather than a spatial map. It seems that the address provided by Gaskell is exactly one of the spatial 'urban icons of tainted female sexuality' that are the self-confessed starting points for Nord's argument and offers a spatial as well as a social component to the town.[50]

From the diagram it can be seen that the main axis of the plot lies across all the domestic spheres of Mary *Barton* and out into the 'half-finished streets' of the periphery. This area is the real location of the clandestine meetings and violent antagonism between the characters that culminated in the murder of Harry Carson which is the 'pivotal action of the plot' and the 'complex human tragedy of the

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[47] D'Albertis describes the 'geographical marginality' of Gaskell and the term has been coined from that source. D'Albertis 68.

[48] D'Albertis 56. Gaskell uses the image of the 'butterfly' for Esther at the end of the novel. She was known to the police 'under this name [...] from the gaiety of her dress' (*MB* 460). The image represents the peripatetic, rootless nature of her profession.

[49] D'Albertis 58

[50] Nord 13.

novel.'[51] It is generally recognised that there are two strands in the plot of *Mary Barton*, the 'romantic' which follows Mary and the 'economic' which follows the fortunes of John Barton. In fact both strands are enacted within the familial and spatial spheres of Manchester and Liverpool, therefore the axis shown in the diagram would seem to summarise the spatial manifestation of the two strands satisfactorily. [52] Although the spatial focus of Gaskell's first novel is the streets and homes of Manchester, Liverpool cannot be ignored. Eight out of the fifty chapters (16 %) of the novel are located in Liverpool and it overlaps with Manchester via relationships between character and place and there is two way traffic of characters between the towns. Another major commercial town and port of the time, it is often ignored by commentators, despite its crucial importance as the place in which the narrative climax is reached. Jem's fate is partly resolved when he is acquitted at the Assizes, of Carson's murder due to Will's testimony and Mary's efforts. Liverpool determined the location of this dramatic climax, as there were no assize courts in Manchester in the early 1840's.[53] The schematic diagram highlights the close link between these characters who were instrumental in securing Jem's acquittal and the place in which the events occur. The townscape and dramatic significance of Liverpool will be discussed in a separate subsequent section of this chapter.

It might be expected from the title of the novel and fig.2.4 that the structural framework of *North and South* operates on two spatial levels, 'the North' and 'the South.' However, this is not the case. *North and South* is fundamentally a 'northern' novel. Helstone, the fictionalised village deep in the southern countryside, appears briefly only at the beginning and end of the novel and once from the perspective of the north when Margaret describes life in the 'south' to Higgins (*NS* 300).

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[51] Edgar Wright, introduction, *Mary Barton* by Elizabeth Gaskell (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987) xiv.

[52] Nord quotes Raymond Williams 'seminal work' in which he makes this point about the dichotomy between the two strands of the plot. She suggests that 'the critical point has had the greatest influence on subsequent readings of the novel.' Nord 145. Certainly Wright uses the idea in his introduction to the novel. Wright xiv.

[53] Manchester did not have its own Assizes until 1864 denoting that Liverpool was an older, town. The county assizes were transferred there from Lancaster in 1835.

Margaret has not lived in Helstone for many years when she returns from London having acted as her cousin's companion. No sooner has she arrived than her father announces his intention to resign his living and move to Milton-Northern. Altogether the 'south' accounts for little more than 10% of the narrative.[54] Although the narrative focus is not trained on the south, it merits some small consideration.

The village of Helstone is located in the 'New Forest' of Hampshire (*NS* 352) although that fact is not revealed until almost two thirds of the way through the novel.[55] It is not primarily a realistic environment. There is no mappable geography and little topography, instead Helstone and its environs are depicted through a series of perceptual filters. Whereas Mrs Hale found it an 'out of the way place,' Margaret identified with the community of poor rural dwellers and animals. She ministered to the forest population and found 'her out-of-doors life was perfect.' (*NS* 17). Mr Thornton thought it 'picturesque' and the village with its 'bosky dell, soft green, and thatched cottages' (*NS* 17) provided an ideal scene for Mr Lennox to paint when he visited. However, the picture of the 'south' becomes focused through Margaret's perceptual filter as she becomes estranged from Helstone after moving north. Receptive to the new experiences of Milton-Northern, she becomes imbued with a northern set of values so that when she depicts the rural south to Higgins, in a chapter appropriately entitled 'Looking South' (*NS* 300) it is through a 'northern' perceptual filter. The realities that had lurked beneath the idealised initial portrait of the 'picturesque' come to the fore when Helstone is seen from a northern perspective. Margaret depicts the 'south' as an undesirable scene of squalor, endless bone-wearying labour, isolation, poverty and ill-health. Towards the end of the story, Margaret returns with Mr Bell to see the 'old place' (*NS* 392). Structurally and dynamically,

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[54] Oxford is glimpsed fleetingly when Mr Hale and Margaret visit. London accounts for 13% of the novel. Helstone accounts for 11%. Therefore if London, Helstone and Oxford are accepted as 'other than the north' they account for only about 25% of the story. Therefore by far the greatest proportion of the text (75%) of *North and South* is located in the north. The figures are calculated by chapter and therefore, are approximate.

[55] The location is rendered topographically secure by the mention of Southampton on several occasions. *NS* 19; 254.

this is a crucial narrative episode, for the reader travels with them on the train and is privy to the protagonist's thoughts and feelings. The 'ineffable longing'(*NS* 385) she experienced on route soon changes on arrival as she confronts the realities and changes which have taken place in Helstone, and as she becomes aware of the changes in herself. Changes in the population due to death and marriage; to the physical landscape like enclosure and cultivation; and to the interior of the parsonage which could be termed 'improvements', were, in Margaret's eyes, simply 'alterations' (*NS* 392). However, it was the revelation of 'the practical paganism' of one 'savage country superstition' (*NS* 390) which involved the roasting of a live cat that really distressed her. Her final view of Helstone is not a realistic one but is filtered through a whole raft of feelings and emotions which must take account of both her growing love and attachment for the 'north' , and 'associations with former days' when her parents were alive. In retrospect, she realised that, whilst it 'would always be the prettiest spot in the world' (*NS* 401), she would avoid a repeat of her visit with Mr Bell. She had reached an acceptance that her future and fate were no longer – if they ever had been – linked with Helstone. The picture Gaskell paints of the south is representative rather than real and it changes according to individual perception. However, an appreciation of the portrait of the 'south' is essential to an understanding of the novel for it is, as Mr Thornton explains: 'the place where Margaret grew to what she is'(*NS* 436). In articulating Gaskell's underpinning philosophy, Thornton ironically omits to acknowledge the role the 'north' has played in forming the person that Margaret has become.

What appears to be a spatial and perceptual dichotomy between the north and the south is diffused and resolved within the story by reconciliation and union. It could be argued therefore, that these diagrams are too simplistic to be meaningful in terms of the subtleties of Gaskell's narrative. However, the diagram, whilst demonstrating this duality of the plot, appears to show that the place and plot are closely correlated through the characters.

Margaret and Thornton feature in the triangle of characters in each of the spatial realms – 'the North' and 'the South' – at the heart of both the romantic and economic threads of its plot. However, in Milton the third apex of the triangle is occupied by Higgins and in the other locations Henry Lennox occupies that position. Margaret and Thornton's appearance in both locations link the two plot strands together through Mr Bell before the Hales even reach Milton. Of course it is the Hales' movement from the south to the north that provides the vital link although the two spheres are strategically and dramatically linked by other key figures that move both between and within the spatial foci.

The major foci of 'north' and 'south' are fictional whereas the glimpses of the two other subsidiary foci are real. However, London and Oxford are symbolic representations rather than geographically realised townscapes. The novel opens in the Lennox drawing room in Harley Street. A single address does not make a map but would have signalled to the reader of the time that Margaret was residing in a middle class professional milieu.[56] Little more is revealed about the metropolis, because events revolve around Edith's impending marriage and removal abroad rather than the place in which they live.

Even less is revealed about the Oxford in which Mr Bell lives. In a description of herself as: 'I *am* Medieval, – and *un*Manchester', inspired by her stay in Oxford, Gaskell describes Mr Bell perfectly (*Letters* 492).[57] A Miltonian by birth, Mr Bell has forsaken the pragmatic commercialism of the north for the 'groves of academe'[58] in Oxford. Nevertheless, he maintains financial interests in the north as he owns the mill of which Thornton is the tenant. Through these financial connections and his longstanding friendship with Mr Hale, he forms a lynch pin in the narrative. He

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[56] In contrast, three London addresses in *Wives and Daughters* creates a map, so do the three Rome addresses in *A Dark Night's Work*. The addresses in *Wives and Daughters* also have social connotations. See Chapter 6 393.

[57] In the course of discussion Mr Bell is accused of 'Oxonian medieval bigotry against his native town.' (*NS* 332).

[58] John Milton *Paradise Regained* (1671) bk. 4 I 240. The source for this quotation is *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* ed. Elizabeth Knowles 5th ed. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999) 518.

moves between Milton-Northern, Oxford and Helstone and by enabling Margaret to become a 'master' in the north, he cements the relationship between north and south as represented by Margaret and Thornton. Representative rather than real, Oxford is associated with beauty, learning and history and is used as a yardstick against which to compare Milton-Northern which is ugly, smoky, commercial and new.

These diagrams, which are little more than conceptual devices in that they provide a simplified depiction to suggest that the structure of Gaskell's narratives is founded upon the places in which they are located. When accompanied by knowledge of the text, they can act as a useful tool to establish unequivocally that Gaskell's narratives grew out of knowledge of the urban environment of Manchester, and were structurally determined by the all the places that make an appearance.

THE URBAN GEOGRAPHY OF MANCHESTER AND ITS ROLE IN GASKELL'S 'INDUSTRIAL' FICTION

Nineteenth century Urban Growth

Comparisons of Gaskell's writing with those of her contemporaries who visited, lived and wrote about the town are well documented, easily accessible and will not be rehearsed again here, although selective reference to Engels, Faucher and Reach will be made.[59] Nevertheless in order to set the Manchester of Gaskell's fiction into its spatial context and allow comparisons to be made, brief consideration of the historical growth and the physical geography of the urban area is necessary.[60]

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[59] Engels and Faucher were continental visitors who wrote seminal works on Manchester during the mid-1840's. Friedrich Engels The *Condition of the Working Class in England,* ed. Victor Kiernan (1845 London: Penguin, 1987); Leon Faucher, *Manchester in 1844* (London, 1844). Reach was a journalist who lived and worked in Manchester as the local correspondent for the Morning Chronicle. Several critics and commentators have used his journalism as the springboard for discussion of Gaskell. For instance, Harriet Guest, 'The Deep Romance of Manchester: Gaskell's *Mary Barton,' The Regional Novel in Britain and Ireland 1800-1990* ed. K.D.M. Snell (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998) 88-90. and Lucas, whose work will be discussed extensively in these pages. John Lucas, 'Engels, Mrs Gaskell and Manchester' *The Literature of Change. Studies in the 19c novel* (Sussex: Harvester, 1977) 34-56.

[60] Although D'Albertis states that Gaskell's narratives are structured urban geography, her insistence lies not in the physical but in the socio-behavioural environment. Fundamental to the argument in this thesis is a knowledge and appreciation of the physical urban geography of Manchester.

From its pre-industrial core sited round the 'Oud Church' or cathedral close to the River Irwell, Manchester developed as a 'cloth manufacturing town' and centre of trade by the early eighteenth century. Prior to the Industrial Revolution, that is by the end of that same century, the town had become a 'provincial centre of the first rank attracting interest for its urban growth, commercial life and transport innovations.'[61] The process of industrialisation and its concomitant urban growth saw the physical expansion of Manchester outwards from its centre around St Mary's Church, Market Square and the main thoroughfare of Market Street Lane.[62] At the beginning of the nineteenth century, this 'high status' core[63] which was a mixture of land-use dominated by commercial and service functions, such as 'public buildings, offices warehouses shops and hotels',[64] had a declining population. Merchants, who had inhabited the large houses gradually moved out to 'a series of suburban enclaves including the prestigious Ardwick Polygon, the Greenheys and Victoria Park districts of Chorlton-on-Medlock and the heights of Broughton and Pendleton,'[65] initiating a trend which produced the suburbs in which Gaskell lived. By the end of the 1830's, the built-up area had a radius of about one mile and by the time *North and South* was being written, in the early 1850's, its radial distance had doubled.[66] Although there were factories in the centre of Manchester, the major concentrations of manufacturing industry lay to the east and south of the town centre.[67] Ancoats had the greatest concentration of mills in the town with 'innumerable streets' of houses in between to

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[61] A J Kidd,. *Manchester* Town and City Histories Series. (Halifax Ryburn, 1993) 19.

[62] Messinger 12.

[63] Richard Dennis, *English Industrial Cities of the 19c.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) 69.

[64] Kidd 25. These are all high order functions that can support the highest land values that are found in the centre of cities principally as a result of accessibility. They have typified Central Business Districts of cities all over the world since the process of urbanisation began in the Industrial Revolution. However in the case of Manchester it must be remembered that there was also a great deal of overcrowding and urban degradation as parts of the C.B.D. were densely populated. The best contemporary descriptions can be found in Engels 83-110.

[65] Hewitt 54.

[66] Bancks & Co, *Manchester and Salford, 1838 and 1848* plans (Swinton: Neil Richardson, 1987).

[67] The map that accompanies Engels' work demonstrates this axis of growth clearly as the northern areas of Pendleton and Broughton appear largely as blank areas. Engels 32-3.

accommodate the workers. The River Medlock Industrial Belt (the Medlock was a tributary of the Irwell, see Fig. 2.1) had developed just to the south. Both these concentrations of mills and factories, developed early in the industrialisation process in Manchester, were the result of unplanned piecemeal development forming an 'overcrowded periphery'[68] adjacent to the 'central business district' (C.B.D.), to use a term coined by geographers to describe the functional core of a town. The specific location of these industrial zones was influenced by their close proximity to river and canal for communication and water supply. Their easterly location was also advantageous because the prevailing south-westerly wind carried the pollution away from the town.[69]

> These east and north-east sides of Manchester are the only ones on which the bourgeoisie has not built, because ten to eleven months of the year the west or south west wind drives the smoke of all the factories hither, and that is for the working class alone to breathe.[70]

Both Ancoats, and the Medlock Industrial Belt which followed the line of the river were a mix of industrial and overwhelmingly working class residential land-use(See Fig.2.5) whereas the 'high status' core served a number of functions and was inhabited by a wide social mix of rich and poor.

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[68] Kidd 40.

[69] The Hales are aware of that wind direction is significant but Gaskell uses their ignorance about it in an exchange injected with irony to signify their unfamiliarity with the town (*NS* 75). This is convincing endorsement that she interwove place and narrative.

[70] Engels 97.

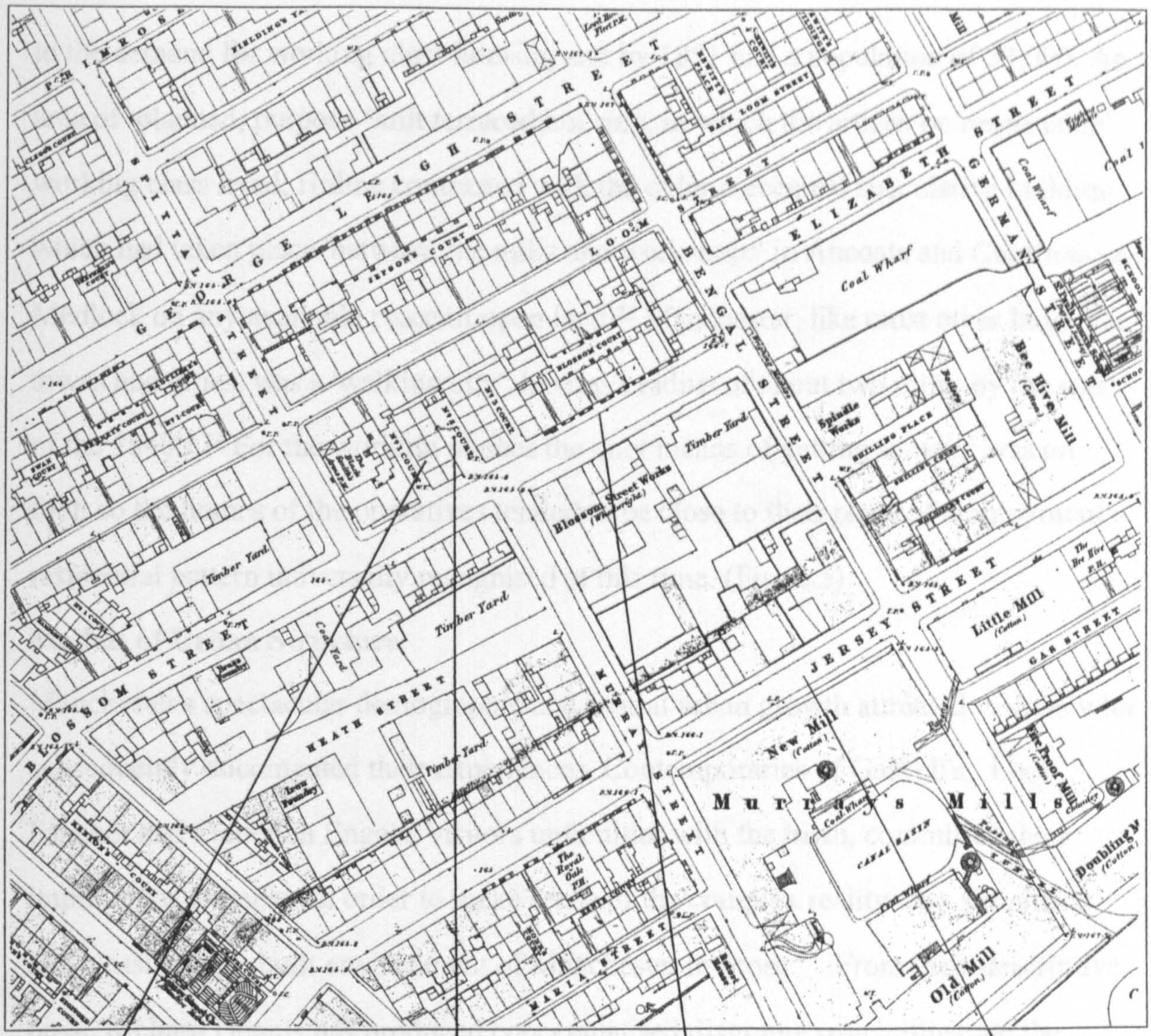

Fig. 2.5 Street Plan of part of Ancoats, Manchester.
Source:, *Manchester,(New Cross)* 1849, plan Sheet 24 The Godfrey Edition (Gateshead, Alan Godfrey, 1988)

Between Ancoats and the River Medlock lay the largely residential area of London Road, much of which, by the time *Mary Barton* was published, had been demolished to make way for London Road Railway station.[71] To the south of the river Medlock lay the townships of Chorlton-on Medlock and Hulme, both working class suburbs beyond which lay countryside. Hulme, which was open fields when Gaskell first arrived in Manchester, was developed during the following twenty years in response

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[71] Easson, notes, *Mary Barton* 403.

to the demand for working class housing and by 1851 had a population of 53,000. An area of planned, purpose-built terraced housing, in which the artisan or 'respectable' working class lived, Hulme contrasted with the older piecemeal speculative building which had taken place 'between the mills and workshops' in Ancoats and Chorlton-on-Medlock on any available piece of open land.[72] Manchester, like most other large 19c towns and cities, was a 'walking city', having a radius of about two miles by the end of the 1840's.[73] For the working classes the only means of getting to work was on foot, so the homes of the operatives tended to be close to their place of employment a residential pattern universally recognised at this time. (Fig. 2.5)

Models of Urban Structure

Manchester's spectacular demographic and spatial urban growth attracted visitors who subsequently documented their experiences. Contemporaries of Gaskell's, Leon Faucher and Frederich Engels, visitors unfamiliar with the town, committed their impressions to paper. In order to make sense of the complex reality they simplified and classified the built environment of Manchester in prose.[74] From their descriptive prose Richard Dennis has produced conceptualised diagrams which illustrate the urban structure of Manchester. Figs 2.6 and 2.7 below.

In their classifications, both Engels and Faucher recognised that the built-up area was a series of concentric residential rings around a central commercial core. However, Faucher highlighted the major north-east/south-west artery from Pendleton along Market Street and Piccadilly to London Road, streets that appear in Gaskell's two industrial novels.[75] Whether ideological, empirical, or both, the 'models' demonstrate

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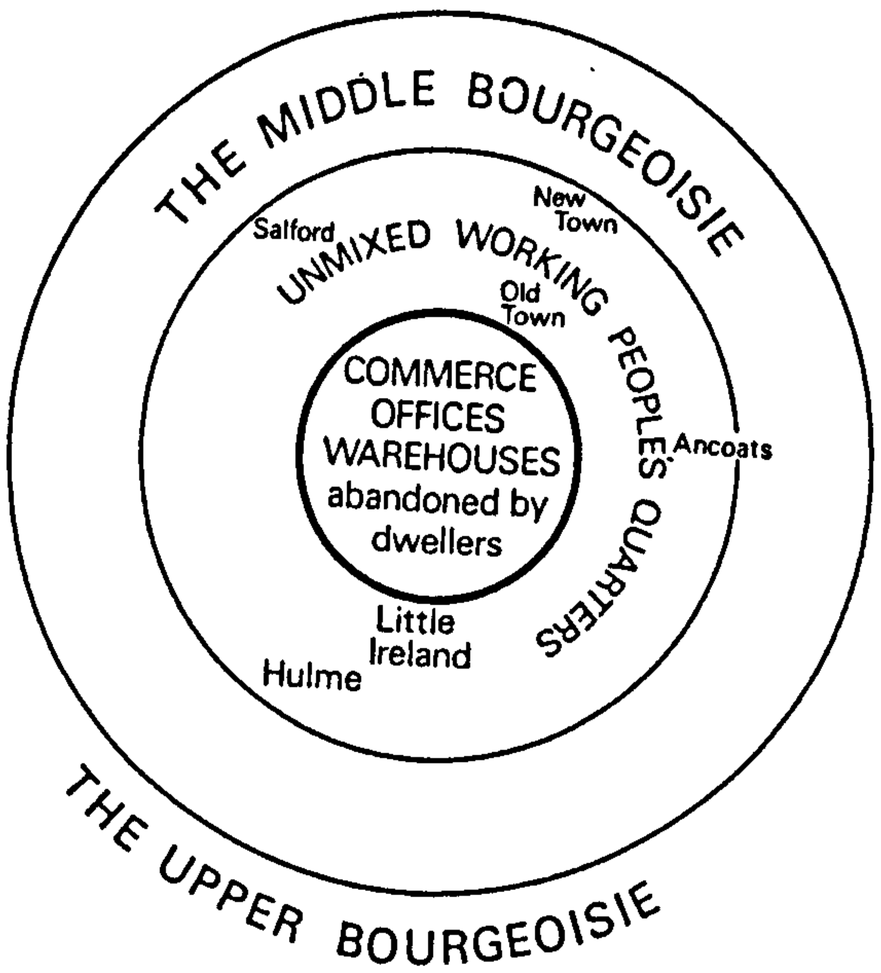
[72] Terry Wyke, letter to the author, Apr. 1999. He writes that: 'Hulme was *the* respectable working class district of Manchester.'

[73] The phrase 'walking city' seems to be in common usage amongst commentators on city life in the nineteenth century. Dennis 113; Christopher Prendergast, *Paris and the Ninteenth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992) 213.

[74] Dennis 81.

[75] Dennis 81-83.



Figs. 2.6 Engels' Model
of Urban Structure (after Dennis)

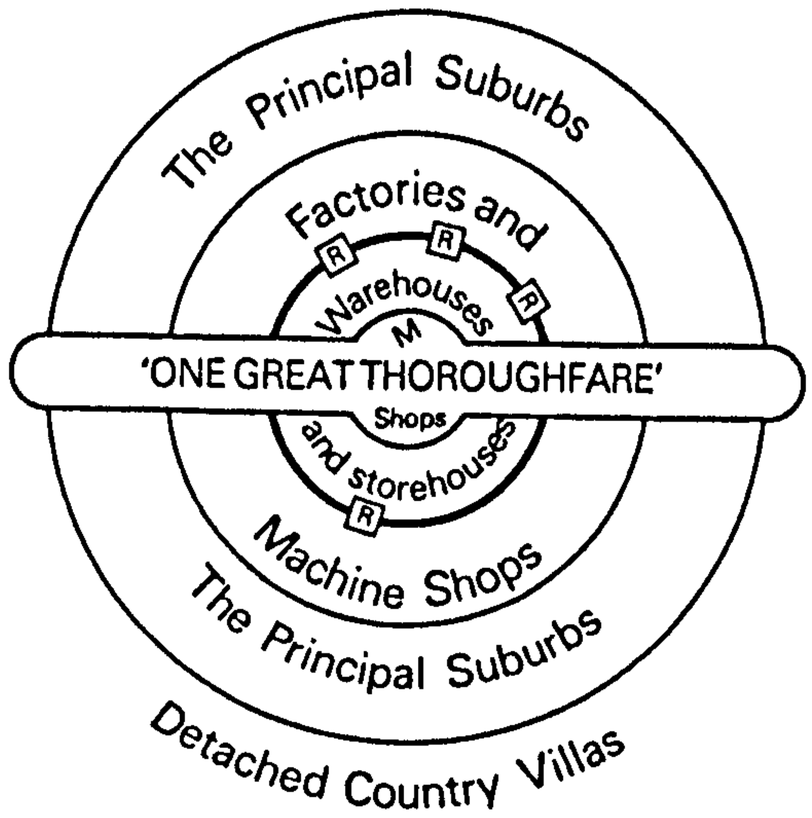


Fig. 2.7 Faucher's Model
of Urban Structure (after Dennis)

Source: Richard Dennis, *English Industrial Cities of the 19c* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986) 82

that 'class divisions are spatially manifest in patterns of residential segregation.'[76]

However, the diagrammatic representations mask the fact that Engels certainly recognised social and land use variations within these broadly defined zones, a point vociferously advocated by late twentieth century economic historians and geographers who have studied nineteenth century Manchester.[77]

Having transposed Engels' text to a diagram, Dennis adapted it further in the light of much later research carried out by Burgess who produced theoretical model of the urban structure of Chicago that incorporated the dynamics of change and demonstrated a concentric ring pattern around a central core. Borrowing ecological concepts, Burgess suggested that urban areas grew and changed by filtering, invasion and succession, processes that were in fact, implicit in Engels account.[78]

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[76] Hewitt 54.

[77] Hewitt 60; Dennis 84-92.

[78] Burgess's model devised in 1925 displayed the same pattern of concentric rings around a central core but he included the dynamic processes of urban growth in his paper to account for change and variation within the simplicity of the zonation. Burgess, E.W. 'The Growth of the City,' R.E.Park and E.W. Burgess, ed. *The City* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1925). Mann added to the wealth of models of urban structure by devising one particular to British cities that built in the prevailing SW wind direction. For the literary connection in *North and South*, see footnote 69 51.

By incorporating these ideas into Engels' model, Dennis was able to produce a theoretical model of urban structure that incorporated Manchester locations like 'Little Ireland', the immigrant Irish enclave, Ancoats, and Hulme into the zone of industry and working men's homes.[79] (Fig.2.6) Gaskell's industrial novels conveniently fit into this inner ring, sandwiched between the C.B.D and the suburbs.

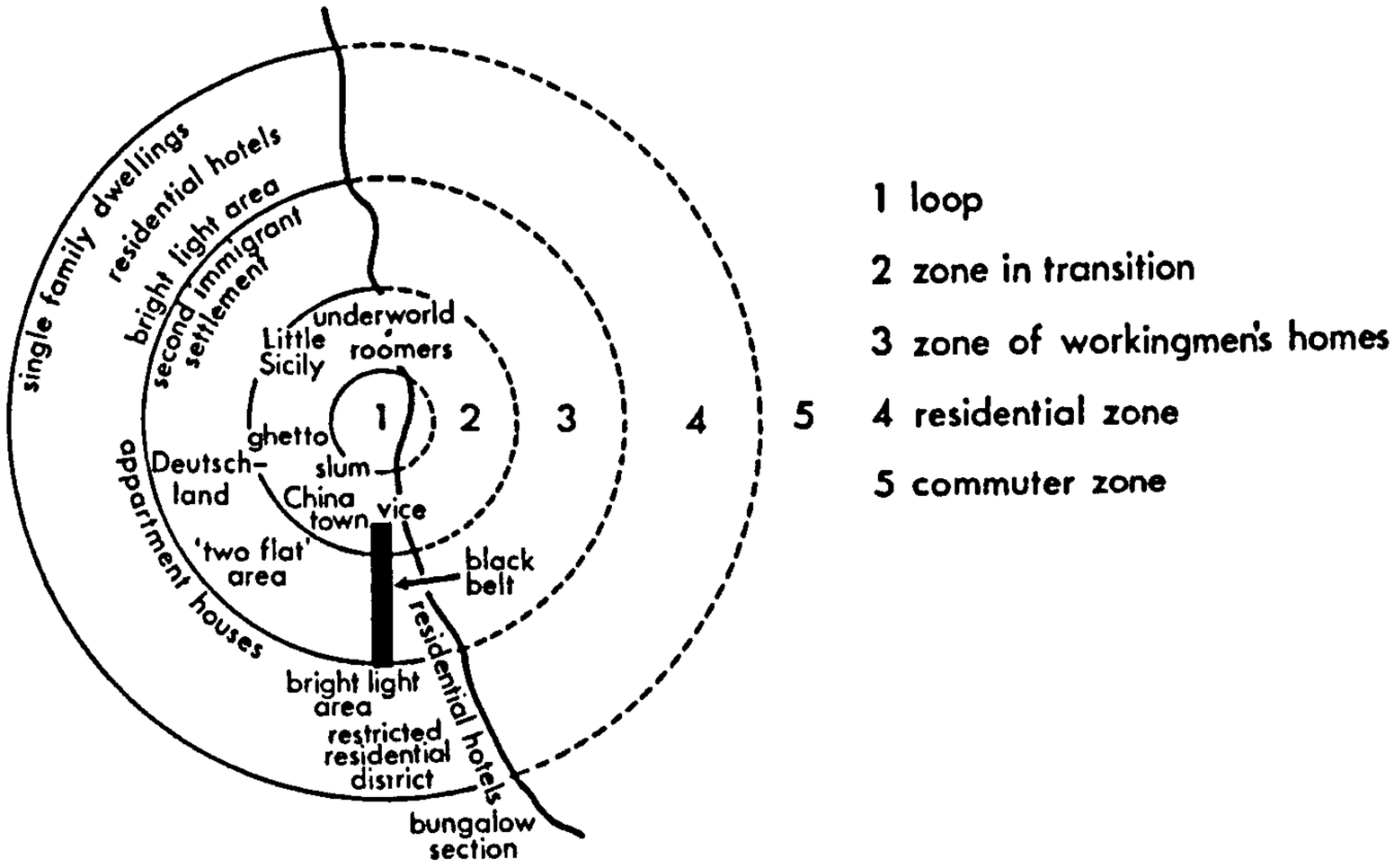

Fig.2.8 The Burgess Model of Urban Structure
Source: M.G.Bradford and W.A. Kent *Human Geography: Theories and Applications* (Oxford: Oxford UP,1977) 73

Simplistic and generalised, empirical rather than predictive, static rather than dynamic, the spatial patterns recognised by Engels and Faucher may be little more than a springboard for discussion of Gaskell's use of urban space and a useful tool for spatial definition and comparison. Unlike Faucher and Engels, Gaskell was a novelist, and although she insists that she was trying to tell the truth about the plight of the working classes, it was not incumbent upon her to provide either a guidebook or a perfectly accurate and realistic account of the urban geography of the town. The net of discussion will be spread more widely in the following section to encompass the full extent of Gaskell's treatment of Manchester, which has already been acknowledged as the structural foundation of her industrial-urban novels.

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[79] Dennis 82.

The real and fictional geography of Manchester.

Gaskell's methodology in portraying Manchester varies according to her narrative purpose. Her first novel focuses on one section of society, the factory operatives and is written from their viewpoint. This subjective narrative perspective has its spatial manifestation in the text in the form of a map that is partial, selective and localised. Therefore as Shelston says it is 'the Manchester of operatives' of 'courts and alleys, half-finished streets' and building sites.[80] The map's heart lies beyond the centre of the town in the mixed industrial and residential areas inhabited by the working class which Engels designated as the 'girdle of unmixed working people's quarters'. (See Fig.2.6) However, an attempt will be made to realise as much of Gaskell's map as possible during the course of the following discussion by combining specific addresses, real place names and scattered spatial clues.

In contrast, Margaret Hale is a stranger, unfamiliar with the geography of Milton-Northern and therefore unable to produce a map of the town. Gaskell builds the spatial structure of Milton on a series of fictional names and euphemistic clues rather than real names and addresses. However, thinly disguised beneath its cloak of fictional nomenclature, there is an embracing and surprisingly accurate, if spatially less specific, picture of Manchester in *North and South.*

The C.B.D.

On their reconnoitring visit to Milton-Northern Margaret and her father arrive by train. The description of the journey from station to hotel demonstrates that they travelled through the town's commercial heart.

> As they drove through the larger and wider streets, from the station to the hotel, they has to stop constantly; great loaded lurries blocked up the not over-wide thoroughfares. Margaret had now and then been into the city in her drives with her aunt. But there the heavy lumbering vehicles seemed various in their purposes and intent; here every van, every waggon and truck, bore cotton, either in the raw shape in bags or the woven shape in bales of calico. (*NS* 59)

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[80] Shelston, 'Elizabeth Gaskell's Manchester' 48.

This description of the vividly realised centre, to which there are merely allusions in *Mary Barton,* reads rather like a guidebook. In fact, if compared with a description in a contemporary guide to Manchester, the parallels are immediately obvious.

> To form a good conception of the commercial character of Manchester, a visit should be paid,[...] to the Exchange, and then a tour made among the warehouses [...] . the visitor will find [...] bustle and activity, the loading and unloading of waggons, the carriers' carts waiting to receive packages, [...] the waggon-loads of cotton, the immense iron-hooped bales for exportation [...] which will convey to his mind an idea of the amazing amount of commerce that is daily transacted[81]

What is fascinating to note is that the centre is a combination of guidebook accuracy seen through Margaret's perceptual filter of unfamiliarity. Not only that but the scene is woven into the narrative as Mr Hale identifies 'New Street' giving the central thoroughfare an apparently fictitious but easily recognisable identification.

> New Street [...] . This, I believe, is the principal street in Milton [...] . It was the opening of this street from a lane into a great thoroughfare thirty years ago, which has caused his property to rise so much in value. Mr Thornton's mill must be somewhere not very far off, for he is Mr Bell's tenant. But I fancy he dates from his warehouse. (*NS* 59-60)

Market Street Lane which was the main road through the centre of the town had been widened and straightened in the 1820's when the word 'lane' was dropped from its name.[82] There was a cluster of hotels at the far end where Market Street merged into Piccadilly, therefore both the time scale and the name strongly suggest that Market Street was Gaskell's inspiration for the Hales' first acquaintance with Milton-Northern. [83]

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[81] B. Love, *A Handbook of Manchester* (Manchester, 1842) 229.

[82] James Wheeler, *Manchester: Its Political, Social and Commercial History* (Manchester, 1836) 258. Wheeler explains that the improvement process that began in 1821 was not completed until 1834.

[83] Engels 86; *Manchester* (*Piccadilly*) *1849,* plan Sheet 29 The Godfrey Edition (Gateshead: Alan Godfrey, 1988). The description on the reverse side of the map makes it clear that the Piccadilly area was the focus of hotels, a fact that Gaskell would have known as there were four facing the Royal Infirmary where her brother-in-law was a doctor. Engels describes Piccadilly as 'the continuation of Market Street' with its 'immense hotels' Engels 86. At the top of Market Street was 'the Exchange' the focal point of commerce which was surrounded and physically overwhelmed' by factories and warehouses. Engels highlights importance of the Exchange as 'the thermometer for all the fluctuations of trade.' Engels 82.

Modern economic historians suggest that the 'overworked soubriquet,' 'Cottonopolis', emphasises the manufacturing rather than the trading function of Manchester and fails to take into the diversity of the town's manufacturing base.[84] Both Hewitt and especially Kidd stress the importance of Manchester as the commercial centre of the cotton trade. The latter comments:

> Manchester was never merely a mill town [...] , for centuries it had offered marketing facilities for linens and woollens and during the eighteenth century had become the regional market centre for cotton mixtures. Thus before the first factory was erected in the 1780's, Manchester was already known for its warehouses. The warehouse continued to play a vital role in its economic life.[85]

Kidd is insistent that: 'Industrial Manchester was not a factory town which had become a commercial centre; from the beginnings of industrialisation it had been a warehouse town with factories.'[86]

In contrast to these present day commentaries about Manchester's nineteenth century economy, observers of the 1830's and 1840's, like Love and Wheeler, focused exclusively upon cotton as the town's manufacturing base.[87] Gaskell, on the other hand, unlike her contemporaries, demonstrates explicitly that Manchester's economy is based upon both manufacturing and trading of cotton and the warehousing of textile products. During the conversational but, at the same time, educational interchanges which took place between Margaret and Mrs Thornton, the latter made reference to the diversity of industry which constituted the manufacturing base of the town in the 1840 and 1850's, from candle manufacture, reed making and printing.[88] Thus a sense of the reality of townscape and economy of the central area of Manchester is interwoven into the narrative through dialogue to provide the reader with an accurate picture, whilst at the same time, educating Margaret about its economy and demonstrating Mrs Thornton's pride in its achievements, as already

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[84] Kidd 30.
[85] Hewitt 30; Kidd 23.
[86] Kidd 25.
[87] There are numerous, foremost amongst which are Love and Wheeler.
[88] Hewitt 46; Kidd 30.

discussed in the section on narrative perspective. As Kidd observes, 'the cotton trade gave Manchester a distinctive physical appearance' by 'creating an 'architectural heritage' for these 'mid Victorian warehouses are one of the glories' of the townscape. 'Often palatial edifices, these were fit for kings [...] which many a monarch might envy'.[89] This reference from Bradshaw's guide of 1857 echoes something of the pride which can be detected in Mrs Thornton's use of the word 'magnificent' to describe these warehouses. They were located in the commercial rectangle bounded by Portland Street, Mosley Street and Princess Street which had previously been the domain of wealthy manufacturers. These warehouses gradually replaced residential accommodation as land values increased and manufacturers moved out to the more exclusive suburbs.[90] This process of residential mobility recognised by Engels and many subsequent commentators is one in which Gaskell herself participated as the location of her homes kept pace with the outer edge of the built environment as has been mentioned. (See Fig. 2.1)

Altogether then, the central core area of Milton-Northern is inhabited, it is thriving commercially and economically, and it possesses a recognisable townscape. As Shelston points although, 'her personal experience as a wife of a leading figure of Manchester life would have brought her into contact with the business centre and cultural life of Manchester', very little of the Central Business District (C.B.D.) appears in *Mary Barton.*[91] This blank space at the heart of Manchester is deliberate for two reasons. First, the narrative focuses on working class life, and secondly because men like Carson had fled to the suburbs by the time Gaskell wrote the novel. The only public buildings and main streets in the centre of Manchester which are mentioned tend to be points of reference rather than major strategic locations of the narrative. The 'Oud Church' (now the cathedral) is mentioned twice by characters

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[89]Kidd 106; Valdo Pons, *Housing Conditions and Residential patterns in Manchester of the 1830's and 1840's* (Hull: University of Hull, 1975) 30.

[90] Pons, Kidd and Hewitt cover these changes thoroughly in their commentaries.

[91] Shelston, 'Elizabeth Gaskell's Manchester' 48.

who are telling stories within the narrative. Not only had the 'Oud' Church been at the centre of the pre-industrial core, but it was also a landmark considered to be the centre of the town. Therefore, it was an obvious and accepted reference point for Gaskell to use. Deansgate, one of the main thoroughfares, is likened to many of the streets that Barton had observed in London (*MB* 115); again Gaskell is using it for reference rather than for narrative purposes. In other words these locations play little part in the narrative structure and drive of the novel. However, the blank map of the heart of *Mary Barton's* Manchester is compensated for by the detailed geography of these working class areas.

Unmixed working people's quarters.[92]

At the time the novel opens, the Wilson family has recently removed to Ancoats from the court in which the Bartons live, the location of which is not specified. No reason is given for their move although mobility amongst the working classes was not uncommon and was often related to a 'complex interaction between economic conditions, mobility, vacancy rates and rent levels.'[93] As Jem was actively employed in the flourishing engineering industry[94] and his father employed at Carson's Mill it may have been due to the ability to pay a higher rent coupled with the need for larger accommodation as there were baby twins in the family. Whatever the personal or economic reasons, Gaskell needed a physical distance between the two homes to initiate and maintain the narrative drive of the novel, therefore the Wilson's intra-

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[92] Engels' terminology.

[93] Dennis 85.

[94] Jem Wilson was employed in a foundry. Engineering was a concomitant of the textile industry generated by the necessity for heavy plant and machinery. Something of the prestigious position held by Manchester companies in world trade is indicated by the fact that Jem worked for 'one of the great firms of engineers who send out from their towns of workshops, engines and machinery to the dominions of the Czar and the Sultan' (*MB* 53) In the vanguard of technological innovation and precision tool engineering in Manchester, Nasmyth may have been the inspiration for Jem's occupation. Nasmyth cut an important figure in the industrial world of the time and had an engineering works at Patricroft and was a good friend of Gaskell's. See Easson, 'The Novel of Local Pride' 689 and Uglow 344; 544.

urban movement was part of Gaskell's narrative 'space-strategy.'[95] It is clear from the beginning that the two families are close friends, both John Barton and George Wilson work at Carson's Mill and Jem has a 'soft spot' for Mary. Such friendships were characteristic of the close proximity in which such families lived partly because of the physical layout of the 'paved courts' around which the houses were built. Indicative of this sense of community was the welcome the Wilsons and Mary received when they arrived in the court after the afternoon in Greenheys fields:

> Many greetings were given and exchanged between the Wilsons and these women (who were collecting in their washing), for not long ago they had also dwelt in this court.
> Two rude lads, standing at a disorderly looking house-door, exclaimed as Mary Barton passed, 'Eh, look! Polly Barton's getten a sweetheart.' (*MB* 12)

In his chapter on contemporary accounts of nineteenth century cities, Dennis makes use of Gaskell's industrial fiction to illustrate his points. However, the following comment of his demonstrates that Gaskell's portrait was not typical of the time:

> Early Victorian writers rarely commented on any sense of working class community unless to show their unease at the congregation of working men *en masse,* or to offer some patronising comments on the gregariousness of life in the slums.[96]

Gaskell is neither patronising nor uneasy in her portrait of the Barton court: her intention is to demonstrate that close friendships like that of the Bartons and the Wilsons grew out of life in those enclosed courts. This friendship is a key narrative link and fundamental to the plot.

Several of Gaskell's working class characters live in these courts which typified much housing of the time. In *Mary Barton,* the two families, 'turned out of one of these innumerable streets into a little paved court having the backs of houses at the end opposite the opening and a gutter running through to carry off household slops, washing suds etc'(*MB* 12). Libbie Marsh moved to 'No 2.—Court, Albermarle Street,'

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[95] Marroni, letter to the author, 20 Apr. 1997.

[96] Dennis 76. He quotes observers of Manchester like Parkinson and Reach who did actually comment on this sense of community, it is a pity that he omitted Gaskell.

(See Fig. 2.1) a fictitious street name but realistic address for the house in which she was to lodge which:

> was the last on the left-hand side of the court. A high dead brick wall connected it with its opposite neighbour. All the dwellings were of the same monotonous pattern and one side of the court looked at its exact likeness opposite [...] . (*LM* 167)

In the course of his discussion, Engels maps these courts in a generalised fashion and describes the housing pattern found in the older urban-industrial parts of the town that would include Ancoats, the Medlock industrial area and the London Road area:

> The space between two streets is divided into more regular,usually square courts. These courts were built in this way from the beginning and communicate with the street by means of covered passages [...] . this method of shutting them up in courts surrounded on all sides by buildings [...] is injurious to the health of the workers. The air simply cannot escape; [...] . Moreover, the houses surrounding such courts are usually built back to back, having the rear wall in common; and this alone suffices to prevent any sufficient through ventilation. [97]

Fig. 2.5 shows the abundance of such courts and the variations on Engels' plan that existed in the older parts of Manchester.[98]

Lawrence and Chris describe the building processes that resulted in the distinctive urban morphology of courts and high-density housing:

> Courts were originally intended to have an open side, but speculators anxious to 'pack 'em in' succumbed to the temptation to build across the open side. This effectively 'closed' the court. The only access was by means of a narrow tunnel [...] as little as three feet wide. The tunnel opened out into a yard which was the only space available for ash and privies.[99]

Fig 2.9 illustrates this passage of prose and Dr.Duncan's 1840 evidence to Parliament includes a plan that corresponds closely to that described by Gaskell in her novels.

(See Fig. 2.10)

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[97] Engels 94.

[98]Report from the Select Committee on the Health of Towns, *B.P.P.* Vol. XI 8 Apr. (1840):130-150. *Manchester 1849,* plans Sheets 23, 24, 27, 28, 29, 32, 33, 34.

[99]Richard Russell Lawrence and Teresa Chris, *The Period House Style, Detail and Decoration 1774 to 1914* (London: Phoenix, 1998) 58.

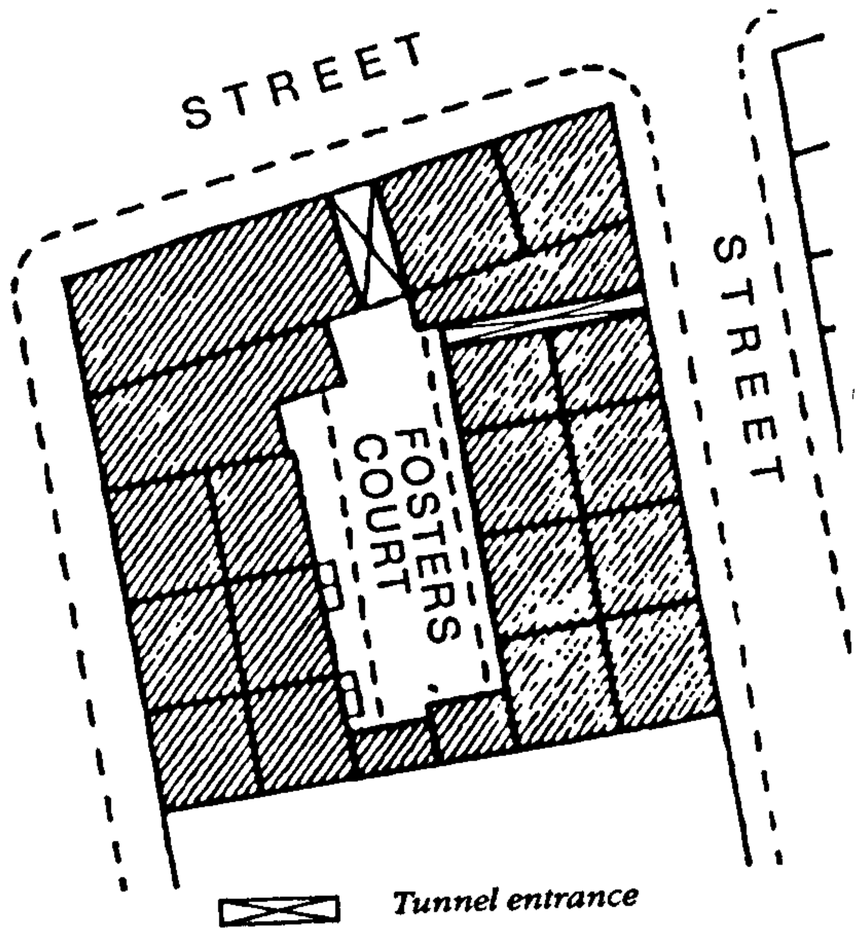

Fig.2.9 Plan of a closed court
Source: Richard Russell Lewis and Teresa Chris *The Period House: Style, Detail and Decoration 1774 to 1914* (London: Phoenix, 1998) 58

Although Gaskell does not provide an address for the Barton home, it seems likely that it was situated in one of the older industrial areas. So great was the demand for housing in the first part of the nineteenth century that speculators utilised every available plot, hence the haphazard morphology of courts and abundance of back-to-back housing.(See Fig.2.5) Although it could be argued that trying to establish a firm location for the Barton home belongs more to Chadwick's realm of 'homes and haunts' than a piece of serious academic research, there is a case to be made for the discussion which follows. The house is minutely realised, a focus of narrative action and the origin of much character movement throughout the story. Gaskell is unique amongst her contemporaries for her meticulous portrayal of the working class environment. Therefore the location of the house is crucial to an understanding of Gaskell's narrative technique and may explain why, although they reach different conclusions, both Lucas and Easson have put forward informed suggestions about its location.

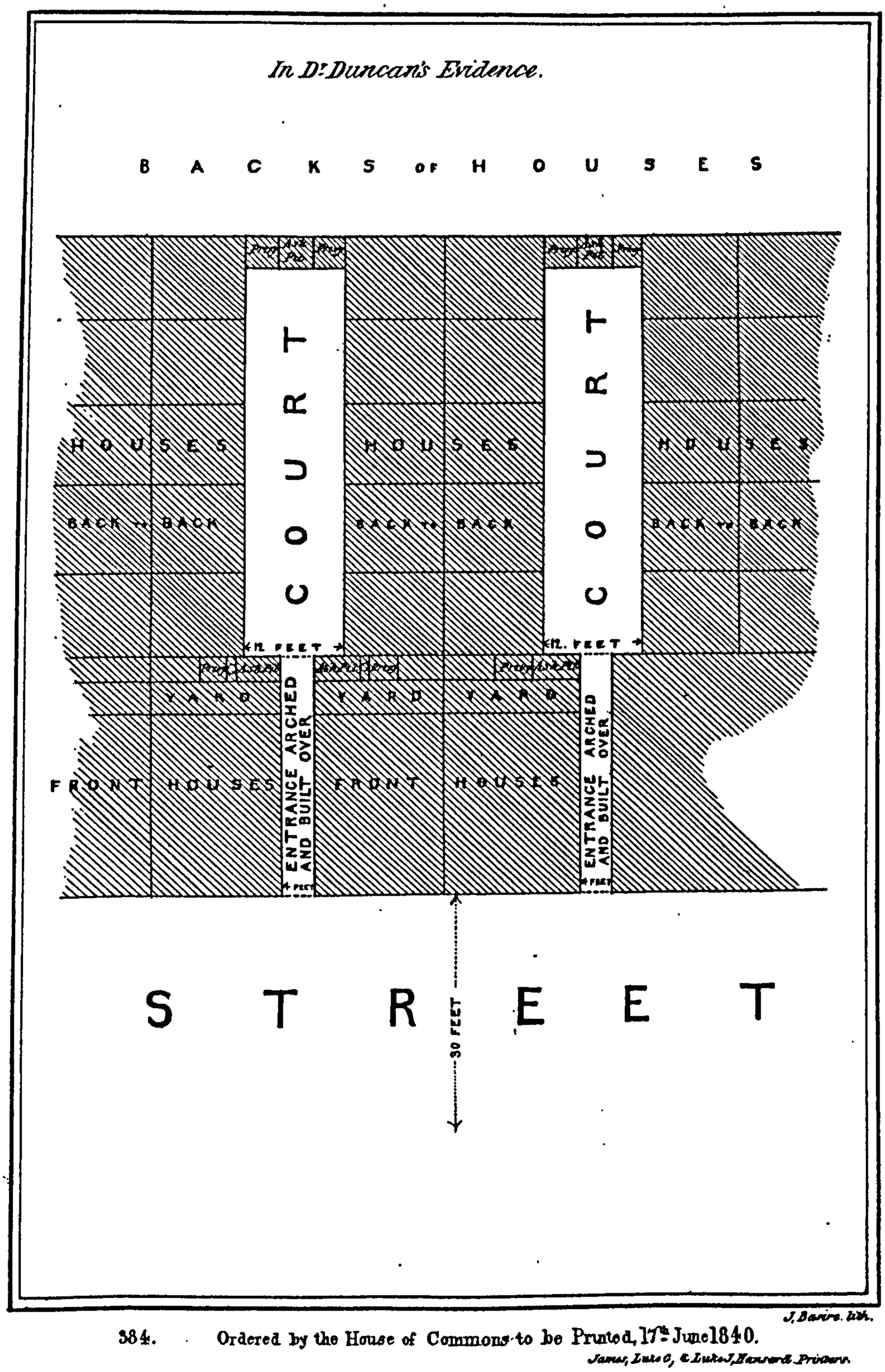

Fig. 2.10 Court Dwelling of 1840

Source: 'Report from the Select Committee on the Health of Towns' *British Parliamentary Papers,* 1840 XI 8 Apr. 1840 130

The Location of the Barton Home.

Lucas' Theory.

Having quoted the lengthy passage from the novel describing both the exterior court plan and the interior floor plan of the house and its contents (*MB* 11-14), Lucas constructs an argument in favour of a location in Hulme for the Barton home in his chapter entitled, *Engels, Mrs Gaskell and Manchester*.[100]

He suggests that Reach's 1849 description of street plans in Hulme accords 'very well with Mrs Gaskell's account of the Barton home and area.'[101] 'Between every street were two rows of the best class of operatives houses each with four rooms and a cellar-a-piece and between each of the rows running the whole length was a paved courtway with a gutter in the centre.'[102] This description does not necessarily accord closely with Gaskell's picture. There is no sense of enclosure in Reach's description suggesting that Lucas may have confused 'courtway' with an 'enclosed court'. The passage quoted above seems to be a closer match with Engels' diagrammatic representation of one aspect of the town's morphology.

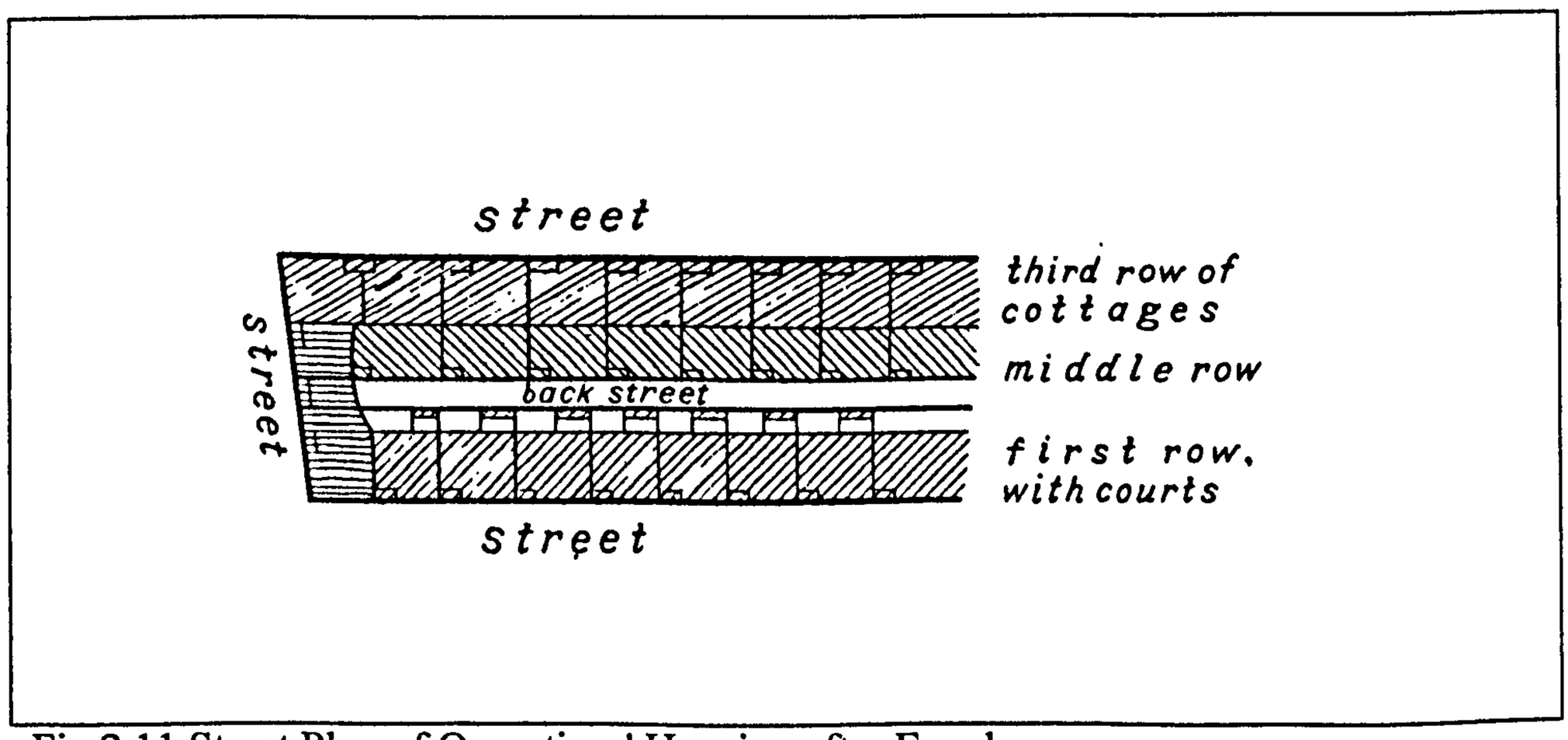

Fig 2.11 Street Plan of Operatives' Housing after Engels
Source: Fredrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (London: Penguin, 1987) 95

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[100] Lucas 53.

[101] Angus Bethune Reach, *Manchester and the Textile Districts in 1849*, ed. C Aspin (Blackburn: Helmshore, 1972).

[102] Lucas 53.

Also Lucas suggests that the house fronts on to the street because there is reference to the 'backs of houses.' In fact in Gaskell's description the only houses which back onto the court explicitly are those 'opposite the opening' which enclose the court at one end and therefore must face on to the street on their other side. As Mary entered the court, 'two rude lads, standing at a disorderly house-door' spoke to her. It may be assumed that the 'lads' were standing at the front door of this house although the text is not specific about the matter. (See Figs. 2.10 and 2.12)

Compared with the earlier urban growth of Manchester, which had been piecemeal and unplanned, Hulme's housing provision was planned, 'developed for artisan dwellings',[103] and much of it post-dated the 1844 legislation that banned back-to-back housing. As it consisted principally of 'innumerable streets of small terraced brick houses', there were fewer courts and less of the cramped overcrowded conditions that characterised the older industrial areas of the town. However the narrator describes how the family 'turned out of one of these innumerable streets into a little paved court' (*MB* 12). The juxtaposition of the results of planned and speculative house building in Manchester leaves the exact location of the house uncertain.

Nevertheless, Lucas, having concluded that they were not back-to-back, suggests that Gaskell was probably thinking of houses that were being built 'closer to the time of actual writing'[104] which fits in with the development of Hulme. A paved court was superior to a sea of mud and was likely to be inhabited by an artisan who could afford superior housing of the sort that characterised Hulme. Initially, John Barton could afford a rent of 2/6d per week. According to Reach, rents in Manchester varied between '3s to 4s 6d and in some cases, 5s' and Wyke endorses this point by suggesting that 'breadwinners in reasonably steady employment would not have paid

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[103] Kidd 40.

[104] Lucas 52.

more than 5s per week in rent.'[105] Barton's rent seems to be at the lower end of the rent scale, so these figures do not provide conclusive evidence about the status of his house. Although the combination of physical and socio-economic evidence may be sufficient to conclude that Gaskell did not imagine the Barton home, as a back-to-back house, she certainly did not make its status clear.

Lucas also attempts to locate the house using the only tiny piece of geographical evidence provided. The Barton family walked along 'many half-finished streets' on their way home from Greenheys. These streets indicate 'the newer end of town' according to Lucas.[106] At the time of writing, (1845-8) Hulme was becoming urbanised whereas a decade previously it was still 'open country to Moss Lane, a real country Lane that led to Greenheys.'[107] If Gaskell had imagined Manchester at the time the novel was set, it could be argued that these half-finished streets did not exist in Hulme or if they did they were much further north than is implied by the families' walk into the built-up area. Careful examination of 1838 and 1841 maps of Manchester indicate that there are half-finished streets in the northern area of the township near the River Medlock.[108] By 1848 the periphery had reached further south to the geographical area that Lucas had in mind. So provided it is agreed that Gaskell was inspired by the morphology of Manchester at the time she was writing the novel, then it seems that Lucas' argument is valid. However, it should be added that in the decade from the late 1830's to the late 1840's Manchester's outward physical growth was rapid. This process of urban sprawl produced a ragged edge of incomplete streets that were partly building sites immediately adjacent to fields. 'Local landowners were reluctant to allow their land to be developed for low quality housing and so it was

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[105] Jules Ginswick, ed. *Labour and the Poor in England and Wales 1849-1851,* vol. I (London: Frank Cass, 1983) 23. Wyke, letter to the author, Apr. 1999.

[106] Lucas 52.

[107] T.R.Wilkinson, J. R. Foard and E. Waugh, 'Reminiscences of Former Manchester. An Xmas Symposium,' *Papers of the Manchester Literary Club* XV (1888-9) 74.

[108] Pigot and Slater, *General Classified and Street Directory of Manchester and Salford,* (Manchester, 1838; 1841) frontispiece.

'parcelled off' in small amounts whenever and wherever it became available.'[109] Therefore 'half-finished streets' would have been typical of the periphery of the zone of working men's homes in areas like Ancoats, London Road and Chorlton-on-Medlock in the 1830's. As the families were walking from Greenheys, south of the town, their route would not have taken them through the 'half-finished streets' of Ancoats to the east, but might have led them through such streets on the edge of Chorlton-on Medlock or the London Road area.

Lucas reinforces his suggestion of Hulme with 'an impressive piece of investigative journalism' by Angus Bethune Reach[110] who wrote a series of reports on Manchester for the *Morning Chronicle.*[111] These were published in 1849, one year after *Mary Barton* was published. Whilst remarkably similar to Gaskell's account, Reach's description of the domestic interior of an operative's dwelling in Hulme reveals one significant difference. Pembroke tables are taken as an index of place, those made of cheaper deal typify Ancoats, whereas mahogany tables are found in the better dwellings of Hulme. The Bartons possess a Pembroke table made of 'humble' deal. Although Lucas notes that 'what was deal in Ancoats was mahogany in Hulme' he seems to ignore this crucial index and goes on to suggest that 'Reach's description of Hulme accords very well with Mrs Gaskell's account of the Barton house and area.'[112] However, he appears to be selective in the use he makes of Reach's evidence. 'A gay-coloured piece of oilcloth was laid from the closet under the stairs to the fire-place'(*MB* 13), floor covering which was also found in homes in Hulme, an indicator which is highlighted by Shelston.[113] In addition, and far more significantly, he fails to take account of the comparative description Reach provides of an equivalent home in 'older, worse-built, inferior Ancoats'. A detailed comparative analysis that is displayed

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[109] Lawrence and Chris 59.

[110] Lucas 53.

[111] Reach's articles could not have influenced Gaskell because they appeared after the publication of *Mary Barton.*

[112] Lucas 53.

[113] Shelston, 'Elizabeth Gaskell's Manchester' 64.

in Appendix 1[114] reveals that the descriptions of domestic interiors by Reach and Gaskell concur in nine respects. The similarities are not confined to objects but to the nuances and symbolic interpretation of the scenes. For instance, Reach refers to a 'glaringly painted and highly glazed tea-tray which has its fictional counterpart in a 'bright green japanned tea-tray having a couple of scarlet lovers embracing in the middle'. Both descriptions mention the firelight which 'danced'(Gaskell) or 'glinted'(Reach) on this object. The other feature worthy of comment is the cupboard with the open door so that 'its assortment of plates, dishes, cups and saucers' can be displayed which appears in both accounts. On the basis of this evidence then it seems that the older, inferior area of Ancoats could be an equal contender as the inspiration for the Barton home. Whatever the truth, the novelist must have been writing from an intimate knowledge gained from first hand observation of the place in order to produce such a vividly realised detailed picture. Although it might be argued that Gaskell's portrait is journalistic and documentary, account must be taken of the way the scene is interwoven into the story through Mrs Barton who features as an integral part of the scene. Also in contrast to Reach, Gaskell emphasises the spatial relationships between the objects in the room to create a detailed ground floor plan of the house. Within the detailed exposition there is a sense that she appreciated what such an environment both looked and felt like. In conclusion then, provided account is taken of Lucas' assumption that Gaskell imagined the townscape and morphology of Manchester as it was when she was writing the novel, and discounts some of the parallels with Reach's descriptions of a domestic interior in an older area like Ancoats, it is quite possible that she imagined the Barton home was located somewhere in Hulme, south of the River Medlock and west of Oxford Road.

However, Gaskell provides numerous clues to the location of the Barton home that are ignored by Lucas.

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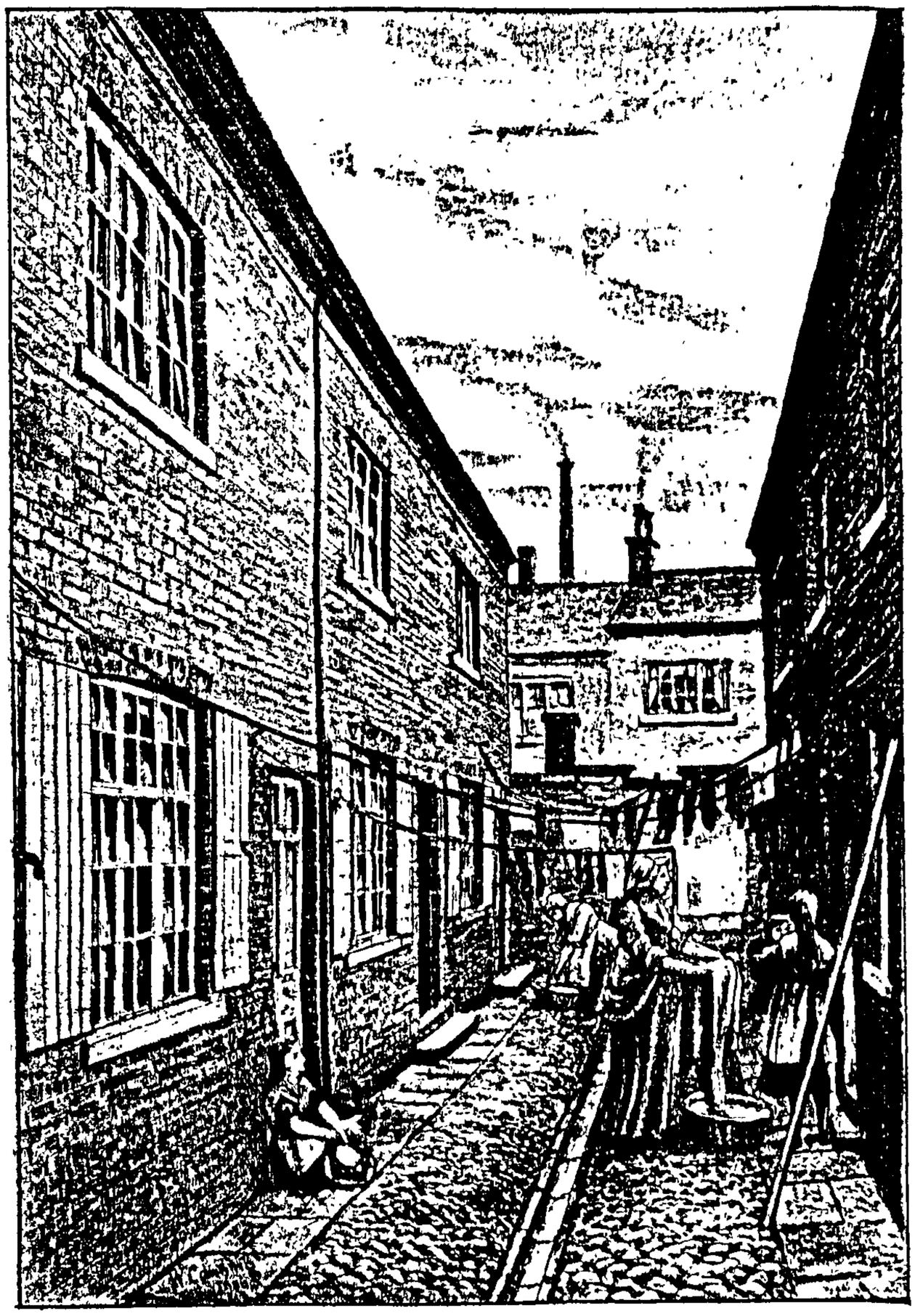
[114] Appendix I 439.



A COURT IN HULME.

From a drawing by William Canning.

Fig.2.12 A Court in Hulme
Source: A.W.Ward, ed. *Mary Barton* Knutsford Edition vol. I (London: Smith, Elder, 1906) facing page 1.

Easson's Theory

By using textual evidence and by carrying out meticulous research in both the field and documentary sources, Easson reaches a different conclusion about the location of the house. On the basis of the location of Alice Wilson's cellar for which Gaskell gives the real address as 'under 14 Barber Street' (*MB* 14), Easson suggests that Gaskell had in mind the London Road area as the site of the Barton home. Although

demolished by the time the novel was published to make way for London Road Railway Station, Easson has traced Barber Street to a location off London Road.[115] Mary was able to fetch Alice for tea as she lived only five minutes away, run to Tipping's (*MB* 14) the grocery shop for ham, eggs and rum and return before Alice 'had walked in a very foot-sore manner' from 'just right round the corner'(*MB* 16;14). Although there does not appear to be a shop owner by the name of Tipping in the London Road area at the time, Tipping Street was located just south of the River Medlock, also off London Road, and might have been the inspiration for the name, if not for the location, of the shop. As the streets are all in the same area they help to support the evidence for the London Road area as the location of the Barton home (see Fig.2.1).[116] Ben Davenport's cellar home, which has the specific address 'of Berry Street, off Store Street' (*MB* 66) is situated in the London Road area of the town so it also helps to confirm the location of Barton's home (See Fig.2.1).[117] George Wilson seeks John Barton's support in caring for the unemployed Ben and his destitute family. John goes home to retrieve pawnable items, shops in London Road 'within a five minutes' walk of Berry Street'(*MB* 67) and returned within half an hour. If his home had been located in Hulme it would have been unlikely that he could have completed all those errands in the half-hour he allocated himself although, 'he strode, and ran, and hurried home' (*MB* 67).

In the novel Gaskell favours defining the town's spatial relationships in terms of time distance, although her letters are scattered with measured distances between places. The novel's time distances endorse Easson's thesis. The most frequent movement in the novel occurs between the Barton and the Wilson home. On one occasion Jem Wilson had arrived at his home in Ancoats at 7.30pm. However even after some delay in speaking to his mother he was able to reach John Barton's home by 8.00pm, the time designated for a meeting with Carson. Easson suggests that Ancoats is one mile

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115 Easson, notes, *Mary Barton* 403-404.
116 *Manchester,(London Road) 1849,* plan Sheet 34.
117 *Manchester, (London Road) 1849,* plan Sheet 34.

away from the London Road area,[118] a distance which can be walked easily in less than half an hour, especially as Jem and Mary 'walked briskly' as 'the time for his meeting with John Barton drew on; and it was a long way to his house' (*MB* 427). On the other hand, the last phrase is the narrator's perception of the distance and perhaps is indicative of a distance greater than a mile. If this is the case, then Hulme would be a more appropriate location for Mary's home because it is at least twice the distance from Ancoats as is the London Road area. Alternatively the 'long way' may be a perceptual rather than actual distance, so perhaps some vagueness or deliberate obfuscation on the narrator's part should be taken into account.

Easson himself, 'enforces' his argument for London Road in his note in reference to Ardwick Green where Mary found employment with Miss Simmonds, a dressmaker.[119] Ardwick Green, was a 'exclusive suburban enclave' at the end of the 1830's located in Engels zone of the 'middle bourgeoisie' about a quarter of a mile beyond, and to the south-east of, London Road. It fitted the street geography of Manchester, lay at a distance Mary would have easily walked to work and was an appropriate place for a dressmaker's business. Surrounded by wealthy middle class manufacturers and their families, the demand for her services would have been considerable; the reality of this is conveyed through the fiction as it was in Ardwick that Harry Carson first spotted Mary as he waited for 'his sisters' who 'were making some purchases' (*MB* 91).[120]

Easson, having carried out comprehensive research using all the geographical clues provided by Gaskell, favours the London Road area as the location of the Barton

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[118] Easson, notes, *Mary Barton* 404.

[119] Easson, notes, *Mary Barton,* 405. Daly endorses this identification with reference to J.T.Slugg, *Reminiscences of Manchester Fifty Years Ago.* Slugg includes Pigot's map of Manchester, 1830. *M*acdonald Daly, notes, *Mary Barton* by Elizabeth Gaskell (London: Penguin, 1996) 394.

[120] Hewitt 55-6. Gaskell's good friends the Winkworth's lived in the Polygon at Ardwick in the early 1840's so it is an area with which she would have been familiar. Miss Simmonds' clients would have been people exactly like the Winkworth's, Gaskell and her own daughters too. Nord points out that rather than sheltering her, Mary's employment *exposed* her to the scrutiny of Harry Carson. Nord 150. Interestingly, like Ruth, Mary was moving into another social realm when she went to work. Her relationship with Harry parallels that of Ruth and Bellingham in social terms.

home. However, he concludes, having assembled the argument, that the writer 'goes to some trouble' to conceal 'exactly where' the house can be found.[121]

Two notable commentators and two substantiated theories have contributed to this attempt to produce a mappable geography of *Mary Barton's* Manchester. Easson is correct, Gaskell conceals the exact location of the house but her methodology is perhaps more complex than he implies. The concealment derives not simply from the lack of an address but from some blurring of the time perspective so that the reader is unsure whether she is using an appropriate townscape for the late 1830's setting of the novel or one with which she came into daily contact as she was writing the story. There also appears to be an amalgamation of two distinct areas of the town as the superior housing stock of Hulme in juxtaposition with the courts of the older areas of the town vie with the addresses and realistic time distances to deliberately baffle the reader. Perhaps, anticipating the reception of the novel amongst the 'millocracy', it is likely that Gaskell decided that discretion was better than spatial specificity when she located the homes of the major groups of protagonists. It seems possible to argue that Gaskell imagined a home in Hulme but chose to transfer the location to London Road for it fitted into the narrative structure and provided a cloak of disguise and concealment. It can be argued therefore that Gaskell probably amalgamated and condensed her knowledge and experience of Manchester to produce her own inimitable geography strongly founded on reality for her first novel, a technique which she employed throughout her writing career as will be demonstrated in subsequent chapters.

Oxford Road

The picture of the working class zone is by far the best developed of all Manchester's urban space. Little details appear here which are absent elsewhere. There are retail outlets along London Road, which provide the basic necessities of life. Mannix, in an unpublished essay, demonstrates this point forcibly supported by detailed reference to

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[121] Easson, notes, *Mary Barton* 404.

Pigot's Directory for 1845.[122] Oxford Street and its southern extension, Oxford Road is typical of all the major arteries out of the town in being lined with shops like Mrs Ogden's the greengrocers (*MB* 49), and mills and factories. Oxford Road is where George Wilson dropped dead (*MB* 113). It is feasible to assume that he was 'tramping', ie. looking for work, when tragedy struck.

Carson's Mill Fire

In addition to concealment of the Barton home, 'she is discreet about the mill's location.'[123] However, Gaskell provides plenty of clues in terms of direction and orientation. Not only can the fire be seen from the Barton court, but also the 'ruddy light' guided Mary and Margaret as they ran into 'the terrible east wind' (*MB* 54-5). Therefore they were travelling eastwards probably towards Ancoats because Gaskell comments that the mill was located in a 'comparatively old part of the town,' which possessed the 'cheek by jowl' spatial mix of mills and housing, therefore, 'the crowded alleys and back streets of the neighbourhood made a fire there particularly to be dreaded' (MB 55). (See fig.2.5)

Mill fires were a commonplace occurrence at the time; whether Gaskell had spectated at such an event must be a matter for conjecture, as there appears to be no documentary evidence to support such a conclusion.[124] It was also about the right distance and direction away and it was close to one of the oldest thoroughfares in Manchester, which could refer to London Road.[125] Gaskell's detailed description of the street pattern and rather grand eighteenth century house 'with its handsome stone facings' which had become a 'gin palace' also indicates the process of urbanisation

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[122] Mannix, 'Charting the City' 9.

[123] Easson, notes, 408.

[124] *Manchester Historical Recorder* (Reprinted Neil Richardson 1984). There were numerous fires listed for the relevant years of 1834-1842. For instance, 1837 Mr Fairweather's factory Cambridge Street. *Manchester* (*Oxford Street and Gaythorn*), 1849 plan Sheet 33. In 1838 the Oxford Twist Company in Oxford Road had a fire. *Manchester, 1849* plan Sheet 33; and, in 1839, Manchester Cotton Mills in North Ancoats caught fire. These mills, especially the latter, are spatially accurate in terms of the Manchester depicted in the novel. In 1844 Henry Winkworth's warehouse was destroyed by fire. Almost certainly Gaskell would have been aware of this.

[125] Engels 95-96; Kidd 24

which had swallowed up the older part of the town. [126] Although there do not appear to be any cotton mills on contemporary maps which have the **exact** east-west orientation depicted in the novel, there are several which approximate to her precise orientation, so that Ancoats seems a reasonable conclusion based on the given evidence.[127] However it may be that Gaskell was deliberately vague because of subsequent events and the sensitivity of the issues.

Angel Meadow

Whilst she remained non-specific about the location of middle-and working-class homes, ironically she provided addresses for the poorest, most marginalised sections of society. Esther's home at 145, Nicholas Street is located in Angel Meadow, one of the most notorious areas of Manchester.(See Fig.2.1) Angel Meadow consisted of eighteenth-century houses with 'pillared porticoes which had declined by the nineteenth century into offices workshops and lodging houses' as the wealthy had vacated the area and moved out to escape industrialisation and its concomitant pollution.[128] Once again Gaskell's familiarity with the town and her awareness of the spatial manifestation of class division enabled her to produce a realistic and accurate map when it suited her narrative purposes and presumably the cellars and Angel Meadow were renowned and so well documented that Gaskell had no inhibitions about including mappable locations for them. However, at the heart of this discussion

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[126] Pollard's biography suggests that the house adjacent to the mill had been 'a gentleman's house'. The implication of the juxtaposition of his sentences is that it might have been Carson's house before he moved out. Arthur Pollard, *Mrs Gaskell Novelist and Biographer* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1965) 46. Alternatively, Shelston has a 'hunch' that the location may be Deansgate as it is 'one of the oldest thoroughfares' and had cotton mills along its length. Shelston, 'Elizabeth Gaskell's Manchester' 60. These hypotheses suggest that Gaskell was successfully vague with her geography.

[127] *Manchester* (*New Cross*) ,plan Sheets 24 and *Manchester* (*Piccadilly*) 29. There are several mills alongside the Rochdale Canal that might have been candidates. Had she amalgamated and manipulated the urban geography, Carson's Mill might have been that found in Marlborough Street in 'Little Ireland'. *Manchester* (*Oxford Street*), plan Sheet 33. Interestingly the roads are built on a NE-SW and SW-NE grid so that the buildings are oriented SW-NE. Gaskell may have thought of this as simply west-east if she had not studied a map. See fig. 2.8.

[128] Interestingly, the parts of Angel Meadow built in the 1830's along the River Irk on the waterlogged clays became insanitary very quickly. Hewitt, 59-60. Undoubtedly there was a deterministic link between site of housing and health; a theme which is iterated throughout Gaskell's work. See Footnote 16 28.

lies a fine irony so typical of Gaskell. Esther's occupation as a prostitute determines that her habitat is the streets of Manchester so she is never seen at her address. She 'flits' as a butterfly from one part of the town to another providing a strategic link between place and character and engendering narrative drive.

The topographical security of Milton-Northern.

'Small, squalid courts'

Little description or spatial detail appears in *North and South* about the homes of the textile workers, Higgins and Boucher. Higgins lives in a small court off a squalid street and Boucher 'close by' (*NS* 90). More than that is not provided but the two adjectives 'small and squalid' signify the conditions typical of much of 'the distressing monotony and urban dreariness'[129] which characterise the working class residential areas of the town like Ancoats and Hulme. 'Small courts' were the characteristic plan of so much of working class housing and the term denoted lack of ventilation, space, and hygiene as does the word 'squalid' in relation to the street with its connotation of open sewers with running highly polluted water probably full of faeces, urine and solid matter like kitchen waste.[130] Gaskell had written extensively in *Mary Barton* about such conditions and as she attempted to provide a more balanced perspective of the population of, and conditions in, Manchester at the time, she deliberately omitted detail of working class location and interior domestic space.

The rented house in Crampton

The opposite is true of the Hales' rented house situated in the fictional suburb of 'Crampton'. Typically, its name is a euphemism implying narrow streets and high-density housing. Its designation as a suburb provides a geographical location. Suburbs lay on the edge of the built-up area as the result of the process of change and outward

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[129] Marroni, *La Fabricca nella valle,* trans. Liliana Smith May (1999) 3.

[130]Admittedly there was a dichotomy between those writers who like Engels wrote from an ideological standpoint, and those who wished to depict Manchester in the context of its glorious achievement like Love and Barton, and Wheeler. However, there were also those writers whose brief was to report the conditions to Parliament and they described the squalor and degradation in vivid detail. ' Second Report of the Commissioners for Inquiry into the State of Large Towns and Populous Districts,' *British Parliamentary Papers* XVIII 1845.

urban sprawl. Crampton lies two miles from Mr Thornton's centrally located mill and home. At the time that *North and South* was written, the radius of the built-up area was two miles, therefore Gaskell imagined that Crampton lay on the periphery of the town. Dennis suggests that Crampton was a 'predominantly working class district' because it was a 'thoroughfare for the factory people.' He assembles supporting evidence from Kohl's vivid contemporary description of the streets at the beginning and end of the working day when the streets became clogged with workers, a phenomenon already discussed in this chapter.[131] On the basis of this slender evidence it would seem reasonable to suggest that Gaskell used Hulme as the inspiration for Crampton, although the township did not extend two miles from the centre at this time. However, its urban morphology is appropriate. It was built over a relatively short period therefore the architectural style was maintained and, in order to maximise the accommodation, the housing density was high and the streets identical.

Gaskell provides a geographical site for the house, which, if rather vague, signals the unfamiliarity of its inhabitants with their new environment rather than uncertainty on the narrator's part. The first floor front room of the house has, 'a really a pretty view over the plain with a great bend of river, or canal or whatever it is down below' (*NS* 60). The river to which Margaret refers is probably the Medlock, which marked the northern boundary of the township of Hulme.[132] (See Fig.2.1) The Bridgewater Canal starts at its confluence with the Medlock at Knott Mill which was the departure point for Sunday School and day outings like that found in *Libbie Marsh's Three Eras*[133] and presumably was the canal which features in the view and provided Gaskell's inspiration. Gaskell provides an address for the house, which like its interior

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[131] Dennis 78

[132] There could be an inspirational connection here with Lucas' theory about the location of the Barton home in Hulme.

[133] At Whitsunside the mills in Manchester closed down for a week and it was traditional for day outings to be taken to Dunham Massey, the seat of the Earls of Stamford and Warrington. An area of landscaped parkland, it was very popular due to its accessibility via the Bridgewater Canal. The embarkation point was Knott Mill, the canal basin close to the confluence between the Medlock and the canal. The long distance view of Manchester in *Libbie Marsh's Three Eras* is from a knoll in Dunham Park. *LM* 183. Undoubtedly Gaskell was familiar with this local beauty spot.

architecture indicates as much about character as it does about place. Initially the Hales live in Crampton 'Crescent'. The apparent grandeur of this street name was appropriate for Margaret. However, the designation later changes to 'Terrace' which is a more precise description of the typical housing layout in Hulme. The rented house possessed a 'heavy cornice' and a 'certain vulgarity', which in Thornton's eyes was not appropriate to the dignity and demeanour of Margaret so it was redecorated for them. From the floor plan provided by Gaskell and the rental value of the property it is possible to identify the house as a medium sized Regency or early Victorian house built between 1811 and 1850.[134] Mr Hale paid an annual rent of £30.00. Although there are few published figures or documented research about rents in Manchester, a 'working class family where the breadwinner was in reasonably steady employment would not have paid more than 5s per week for rent', that is about one-fifth of his weekly wage[135] which represents about £13.00 per annum. John Barton paid half a crown per week, which is the equivalent of £6 10s. per annum. Therefore it is clear that an annual rent of £30.00 is likely to be paid by the professional or entrepreneurial middle classes for a house such as the one described.[136] This size and value of this house and its distance from Thornton's mill implies that Gaskell imagined it far more grand than most of the residences that might be expected in Hulme. The discrepancy suggests that the Hale home was more a product of creative imagination than a replica of geographical reality of Manchester, which is entirely appropriate to the fictional nature of Milton-Northern. Therefore, if geographical and social clues do not provide topographical security for the Hale home, clearly Gaskell's intentions were elsewhere. It seems that she wanted to convey the physical and social incongruity of Margaret's new home because she believed that character and place were inextricably linked. The

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[134] Lawrence and Chris, 49-53. On page 51 is are ground and first floor plans that correspond closely with the domestic space described by Gaskell. This domestic space indicates that the family was middle class for their living space was considerably greater than that of the working classes such as the Barton or Higgins families. The rent for such a house was between £16-£26 per annum which seems commensurate with the £30.00 paid by the Hales.

[135] Wyke, letter to the author, May 1999

[136] The Gaskell's paid £150.00 per annum for Plymouth Grove. It was a much larger house.

lack of a mappable location does not demonstrate that the material of the novel is being handled by someone unfamiliar with Manchester; on the contrary, if the distances and descriptions do not fit, it may be a deliberate attempt to dissemble, and not lack of spatial awareness in the writer. Manchester was merely the inspirational springboard in this novel.

In order to complete both the geography of Manchester and the correlation between the models of urban structure and Gaskell's fiction, it is necessary to move beyond the working class area to the periphery.

The Middle/Upper Bourgeoisie[137]

The location of Mr Carson's home.

Gaskell maintained her attempts at obfuscation about some locations in relation to the Carson residence. Judging by the description, the house was located on the edge of the built-up area amongst Engels' 'middle bourgeoisie' (the equivalent of Faucher's 'principal suburbs'). The exact spot is difficult to pinpoint, for Gaskell merely describes the house as two miles from the Davenport cellar but no direction is given. Easson is one of the few commentators to suggest a location for the Carson home. Harry Carson's short-cut home is via Turner Street and there is a Turner street in that locality at approximately the correct distance.(See Fig.2.1)[138] Although Easson takes the argument no further, it does seem that his suggestion may be valid for Ashton New Road runs in an easterly direction from London Road. Gaskell would have known it for her close friends the Winkworths, lived in Ardwick, which was very close to the Ashton Road, for a time at the beginning of the 1840's. Therefore it fits spatially into the eastern sector of the town depicted by Gaskell in the novel but lies appropriately beyond the zone of working class housing in the area designated by Engels and Faucher as 'the middle bourgeoisie' and 'principal suburbs' respectively.

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[137] This term is derived from Engels' model of urban structure. Although it is difficult to be precise, the house would have been on or near the boundary between the two zones.

[138] Easson, notes, *Mary Barton* 410.

(See fig.2.6 and 2.7). If, as some commentators have suggested [139] these models were derived as much from political and social ideology as empirical evidence and geographical observation, then the dichotomy between rich and poor is spatially manifest in Gaskell's segregation of the Bartons and their ilk from the manufacturing classes represented by Carson.

The ragged periphery

Urbanisation and urban growth, processes which by their very nature involve spatial and temporal change, are interwoven into the narrative of *Mary Barton* as the ragged edge of the town, with its 'half-finished streets' and building sites are strategically important foci of action. The conduits of movement are distinguished by Gaskell who considers that a 'road' is called a 'street in compliment to the intentions of some future builder' (MB 206). These street scenes provide her portrait of Manchester with an authenticity which eludes Engels and Faucher, for their simplistic models inevitably have no in-built dynamic element and are only snapshots of the town in the mid-1840's .

Despite their non-specific location, these streets and development sites are meticulously realised. Whilst the illicit assignation between Harry and Mary is an unspecified distance from her home, the location of Jem's meeting with Harry and the latter's subsequent murder takes place in Turner Street. Lying close to the Carson home it is the short-cut taken by Harry to his garden-door. Although not privy to the murder, there is a vividly realised scene when Jem and Harry meet. At this moment, the two narrative strands of domestic and economic touch at this point in the story as 'dark sturdy artisan' meets 'gay, handsome, millowner heir' to fight over a lover.

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[139] Dennis quotes David Ward who has argued that images of the city that emphasised a 'dichotomous segregated residential pattern' were grounded not in reality but in ideology. He goes on to highlight the diversity within the poor areas, a characteristic already noted. Dennis 49. Gaskell wanted to write from the perspective of the working class in her first novel. If this perspective is interpreted as an ideology then it follows that her portrait of Manchester was the spatial manifestation of that ideology. To follow that route of argument perhaps imbues Gaskell with an intention that did not exist. She herself said that she 'wanted to tell the truth' and believed that was what she was doing.(*MB* xxxvi); Easson, introduction 32. Kidd highlights the socio-spatial segregation that existed by quoting Faucher who wrote in 1844, 'The rich man spreads his couch amidst the beauties of the surrounding country, and abandons the town to the operatives 'publicans mendicants, thieves and prostitutes'. Faucher, 26-7.

> It was the workman's dinner-hour, the interval between twelve and one; when the streets of Manchester are comparatively quiet, for a few shopping ladies, and lounging gentlemen, count for nothing in that busy, bustling, living place. Jem had been out on an errand for his master instead of returning to his dinner, and in passing along a lane, [...] he encountered Harry Carson the only person as far as he saw beside himself treading the unfrequented path. Along one side ran a high broad fence blackened by coal-tar and spiked and stuck with pointed nails at the top to prevent anyone climbing over into the garden beyond. By this fence was the foot-path. The carriage-road was such as no carriage, no, not even a cart, could have possibly have passed along without Hercules to assist in lifting it out of the deep clay ruts. On the other side of the way was a dead brick wall; and a field after that, where there was a saw-pit, and joiner's shed. (*MB* 206)

The juxtaposition of field and garden fence conveys a distinct sense of the urban periphery, as does the field itself, which is cluttered with builder's paraphernalia. Underlying the realism Gaskell intended to convey subtle symbolism. The scene exposes the arrogance and hypocrisy of a millowner's son whose wealth creation may be responsible for the unplanned urban growth. His attitude contrasts with the earnestness of Jem, a working class, skilled mechanic, just as it contrasted with the naivety and truthfulness of a seamstress whom he met in a similar rather unspecified peripheral location; indeed, it may have been the same place.

The Rural Periphery

Greenheys

Greenheys fields appear in both Gaskell's industrial novels, fictitiously and fleetingly in *North and South* and more strategically in *Mary Barton.*

Margaret and her father wander in unnamed fields beyond Milton where Margaret collects flowers that she gives to Bessy, her new found friend, whom she met on the 'road' home. (Gaskell's use of the word 'road is an index of the rural nature of the environment; see previous page). This rural environment and its flowers are intended to provide a symbolic narrative link between Margaret's former life in Helstone and Milton-Northern.

In her first novel Gaskell had no inhibitions about the identity of this green open space probably because it lay outside the urban area and had no associations to which

there could be objections. The detailed spatial layout provided at the beginning was derived from her personal knowledge of the fields. The novel opens in 1834 at which time there was no public open space in Manchester. The first municipal park did not open until 1846,[140] prior to that the factory workers looking for 'a place of resort'[141] on a half-holiday would have had to look beyond the town. Greenheys would have been within the sphere of influence for the Bartons whether they lived in Hulme or the London Road area given the length of time they had at their disposal.[142] Gaskell knew the fields well, as her home lay only half a mile from Greenheys.[143] A letter from William Gaskell to W.J.Faraday written in 1871 provides a description, which echoes very closely a passage from the opening of the novel:

> Having none of the craftsman's skills I am not sure whether I can make quite clear to you the spot referred to at the beginning of *Mary Barton.* If you go along what may be called Greenheys proper till you come to a path across a field, [...] and take this path and it will bring you to Moss Lane. Then cross this and enter the fields and walking perhaps a couple of hundred yards you will find, or once would have found, a black and white farm-house with a deep, clear pond by it. This is the house referred to in *A Tale of Manchester Life.*[144]

This evidence provided by her husband who emphasises the route and the Rumford Street perspective suggests that this route may have been one of Gaskell's favourite

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[140]Kidd 58. In 1846 the first three public parks were opened in Manchester, Peel Park, Queen's Park and Philip's Park. None of them were on the southern side of the town.

[141] Faucher questions the lack of 'places of resort'. He writes, 'If people of Manchester want to go out on a Sunday, where must they go? There are no public promenades, no avenues, no public gardens and even no public common-only Greenheys fields'. Faucher 9.

[142] It was about a mile from Greenheys to both Hulme and the London Road area.

[143] Uglow confirmed this in a telephone conversation, Feb. 1994. There is further evidence that the inhabitants of Manchester used Greenheys as a 'place of resort'. Howe quotes a German visitor to Geraldine Jewsbury's house in Carlton Terrace Greenheys in 1850. He wrote:

> From the front windows of the house one looks out on a sort of garden street with some handsome country houses, and from the back, or yards which merge into wide meadow-lands, over which in the distance long rows of chimneys tower out of black smoke clouds. On the whole it is quiet and retired out here. Only at noon and in the evening the meadows come to life when the labourers are on their way home, and Saturdays and Sundays one sees them in gala attire with their wives and children going out to the people's amusement park which with its meagre equipment offers the worker his only recreation place.

Susanna Howe, *Geraldine Jewsbury: Her Life and Errors* (George Allen and Unwin, 1935) 39.

[144] 'Pepperhill Farm,' *Manchester Guardian,* 11 Nov. 1904.

walks. Children who attended the Lower Mosley Street Sunday School were also taken there on Sunday afternoons. Gaskell would have accompanied them, as she was an enthusiastic Sunday School teacher.[145] William's reference to the farmhouse is significant for it is the garden that is given particular attention in the novel:

> The porch of this farm-house is covered by a rose-tree; and the little garden surrounding it is crowded with a medley of old-fashioned herbs and flowers, planted long ago, when the garden was the only druggist's shop within reach, and allowed to grow in scrambling and wild luxuriance–roses, lavender, sage, balm, [...] rosemary, pinks and wallflowers, onions and jessamine in most republican and indiscriminate order. This farm-house and garden are within a hundred yards of the stile of which I spoke, leading from a large pasture field into a smaller one, divided by a hedge of hawthorn and blackthorn; and near this stile, on the further side, there runs a tale that primroses may be often found, and occasionally the blue sweet violet on the grassy hedge-bank. (*MB* 2)

The sensual detail of this specifically located and carefully observed initial scene has all the hallmarks of a place with which Gaskell was familiar. It is reminiscent of Sandlebridge (*Letters* 5-6). The fact that she begins a novel the theme of which is the plight of the working classes in a rapidly urbanising, industrialising centre with the depiction of a rural scene may be significant for two reasons. It generates narrative drive as the characters walk into the urban environment from the outside. Also it could be argued that Greenheys symbolises a deep psychological denial of this urban centred story that she felt a compulsion rather than a desire to write.

LITERARY – SPATIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Narrative Structure and Narrative Drive

Having mapped the geography of Gaskell's Manchester and Milton-Northern, in so far as this is possible, it remains to consider the relationships between the spatial and the literary in order to demonstrate that the place is the fundamental structural framework of the tales. Interior domestic space frames the lives of the inhabitants. It is enclosed, private space which is often shared by friends and less frequently encroached upon by unwelcome visitors but is subject to the prevailing economic conditions so that it

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[145] Brooke Herford, *Travers Madge: A memoir*, (Manchester, 1867).

changes over time. The interiors are vividly realised, (details which helped to establish the geography of Manchester): time spent in these spatial foci is often used for narrative pause in which there are opportunities for reflection and thought, authorial comment, especially in *Mary Barton.* These domestic spaces are of strategic importance in both industrial novels and will be considered here.

Gaskell's use of Manchester's geography is particularly suited to the linear narrative of both novels.[146] The streets of the town act both as channels of communication and as spatial foci for action, dramatic tension and pivotal moments in the narrative. Whilst character movement initiates and maintains the momentum, the varying speed of movement provides narrative pace which in turn heightens dramatic tension. Gaskell is able to reveal the realities of Manchester and Milton from domestic interiors to street life, as her characters are the subjects of planned meetings and chance encounters.[147] Types of movement demonstrate personalities and states of mind. Through this movement which is neither constant nor regular, the two distinguishable 'romantic' and 'economic' narrative strands of both stories are demonstrated and interwoven. However, although the movements of the characters generate narrative drive, the narrator herself remains in control of the pace and progression of her story. At times the narrative pauses whilst characters are introduced, socio-economic conditions detailed and, particularly in her first novel, Gaskell's views are advanced. Such pauses inform and add variety and interest to the narrative structure. It is the intention of the following section to discuss the literary-spatial relationships of the each of the novels separately.

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146 Edgar Wright, *Elizabeth Gaskell: The Basis for Re-Assessment* (London: Oxford UP, 1965) 233.
147 The relationship between environment and state of mind is a notable aspect of both *Ruth* and *Wives and Daughters.*

Mary Barton

The introductory rural scene in *Mary Barton* is used to articulate the major themes of the novel.[148] At the forefront of Gaskell's thinking was the injustice of the industrial system in which the wealth lay in the hard work of the workers who were poorly paid and subject to the economic vagaries of the market and the ignorance which prevented understanding between 'masters and men.' However, at the forefront of her characters' minds at this moment, was the fate of Esther, Mrs Barton's sister who, having been well remunerated during a time of economic boom, had disappeared from her employment in a textile factory. Theme is interwoven into the narrative here by means of the dialogue between the Barton and Wilson families, whereas later in the story, the tone becomes more didactic and long passages of exposition of the socio-economic issues are presented to the reader. Although Greenheys fields are located beyond urban Manchester, the concerns determined by the urban environment remain.

The strong narrative drive with its varied pace of her first novel is initiated as the family groups make their way into the urban environment from the fields beyond enfolding the reader into the story as they go. 'The party proceeded home, through many half-finished streets all so like one another that you might have easily been bewildered and lost your way. Not a step, however, did our friends lose; down this entry, cutting off that corner' (*MB* 12). Sheila Smith describes the prose as 'pedestrian'.[149] Whether she intended criticism or a pun is difficult to detect. What seems far more important to note is that Gaskell's clipped phrases: 'not a step,[...] down this entry, cutting off that corner' aptly convey the way the characters negotiate what appear to be a labyrinth of narrow alleys, entries and passages. Familiar with the route, (unlike the narrator) they had no difficulty in finding their way; they even

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[148] Uglow suggested in a telephone conversation, Feb. 1994 that Gaskell began the novel in such an environment because it was familiar to her. Therefore it can be argued that at this point the issues had no correlation with the spatial environment.

[149] Sheila Smith, *The other Nation: The Poor in English Novels of the 1840's and 1850's* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980) 92.

knew and followed short-cuts. Having reached home, the pace increases as Mary 'ran' off (*MB* 14) to fetch Alice and buy provisions for the tea party. That night, when his wife went into premature labour, John Barton 'ran' for the doctor, stamped with impatience as he waited for the doctor, and 'walked so fast homewards, that the medical man several times asked him to go slower' (*MB* 19). The pace of the narrative is encapsulated in the speed of movement of the characters, the doctor's infuriating slowness serves to build up the dramatic tension and draws the reader's attention to John's anxiety. In the aftermath of Mary's death, the pace slows as John sits in his kitchen confronting his grief. Gaskell, in total control of her narrative uses the pause in this particular domestic setting to introduce her 'hero', John Barton, a weaver:

> One of the good influences over John Barton's life had departed that night [...].He had [...] become an active member of a trades' union [...] cared much for the differences between employers and the employed,- [...] . His parents had suffered; [...] . He himself was a good, steady workman [...] . And when his master suddenly failed, [...] Barton had only a few shillings to rely on. (*MB* 22-24)

The Barton home is the spatial focus of her first novel appearing in 58% of the chapters of the novel. Many of the characters visit the Barton home during the course of the story. It is the place in which there is a happy family holiday tea after which Mrs Barton goes into premature labour and dies, the place from which John leaves to petition to Parliament, to murder Carson, and the home to which he returns to die. It is also the place where Mary acknowledges to herself her love for Jem, the place in which Esther ends her days, and its changing interior is an index of Manchester's prevailing economic conditions.

Interior domestic space

Narrative pauses are used to map the geography of the house interiors just as street layouts provide routes for character movement to move the story forward. In these narrative pauses, Gaskell draws detailed plans of three contrasting working class interiors; John Barton's home and the cellars of Alice Wilson and Ben Davenport.

When the novel opens, Manchester is experiencing an economic boom and John Barton's house-place which 'seemed almost crammed' with furniture ('sure sign of good times among the mills') (*MB* 13), contained several objects which had disappeared several years later when trade was depressed and John was unemployed. The need for food took precedence, so the 'red-hot fire' with its 'ruddy glow' and 'dancing firelight' (*MB* 13) had been exchanged for the cold fireside. Gaskell recounts how the house had 'been stripped of its little ornaments', presumably those 'non-descript' articles like the knife rests and perhaps some of the crockery and glass of which Mrs Barton was so proud. Certainly, Mary had sold the 'smart tea-tray' and the 'tea-caddy' to the pawnbroker (*MB* 132).[150] Although they managed to retain the house because of a 3d reduction in the rent,[151] all of its cosy charm and colour disappeared. In employment as a handloom weaver, John Barton could afford a house in a 'little paved court' whereas those who were much poorer lived in cellars. Cellars were located in 'former higher grade housing which had declined and been converted into several tenancies occupying whole floors and single rooms of which the meanest was the cellar.'[152]

Both Alice Wilson and Ben Davenport lived in cellars but under totally contrasting conditions. Alice a poor, hard-working washerwoman who originated from beyond Manchester, kept a 'scrupulously clean, whitewashed room, in which was 'a modest bed.' Although damp, the floor was brick, and the ceiling and 'area' outside was festooned with her favoured 'hedge-row, ditch and field plants.'(*MB* 15)[153] Makeshift furniture and basic utensils complete the picture. Ben Davenport, an employee at

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[150] Realism was expressed through the concreteness of physical objects in the nineteenth century. This view is expressed by Angus Easson, in 'The Sentiment of Feeling Emotions and Objects in Elizabeth Gaskell', *Gaskell Society Journal* 4 (1990): 66. The home and its paved court and the objects inside play a symbolic role too. They are indicative of social status. In the tradition of Scott they also represent the 'local colour' and therefore depict a sense of place.

[151] Job Legh was a spinner and reputedly had high wages whereas handloom weavers were the poorest paid. In 1835, the average wage for a handloom weaver was 5s to 7/6d per week. The Barton rent had previously been half a crown per week. The rent reduction saved Barton from a move.

[152] Kidd 46.

[153] Cellar dwellings were not regulated until 1853. Kidd 49-50. By the time the novel was written Barber Street had disappeared. Easson, notes, *Mary Barton* 403.

Carson's mill, was also from beyond the town. In contrast to Alice however, he lived in utter squalor and destitution in a cellar located in an unpaved street, the description of which, is intended to prepare the reader for the sight of the interior.

> Berry Street [...] was unpaved; and down the middle a gutter forced its way, every now and then forming pools in the holes with which the street abounded [...] . As they passed, women from their doors tossed household slops of *every* description into the gutter; they ran into the next pool, which overflowed and stagnated. Heaps of ashes were the stepping stones [...] . (*MB* 66)

'After this description of the street, no-one can be surprised' about the state of the interior of the cellar. In addition to the visual impact, her totally realistic description, in which there is no trace of hyperbole, is an assault on all the senses of the reader.[154]

> On going into cellar inhabited by Davenport, the smell was so fetid as almost to knock the two men down [...] . It was very dark inside. The window-panes were many of them broken and stuffed with rags, [...] three or four little children rolling on the damp, nay wet, brick floor, through which the stagnant, filthy moisture of the street oozed up; the fire-place was empty and black; the wife [...] cried in the dank loneliness. (*MB* 66-67)

Fryckstedt suggests that a good deal of this narrative commentary is lifted verbatim from the Ministry of the Poor Reports over which her husband presided. This view seems defensible for, as Fryckstedt admits, it enabled Gaskell to put the accepted Unitarian view of the situation and satisfied her need to educate her readers just as she had been educated about the political economy which galvanised and sustained the population of Manchester.[155] Although Fryckstedt argues that Gaskell used

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[154] Gaskell's intentions here are similar to those Joseph Conrad: to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you *see*'. Joseph Conrad, *The Nigger of the Narcissus* vol. III (London: Gresham, 1925) x. The sensuality of this scene in the cellar is paralleled by Greenheys fields.

[155] Monica Fryckstedt, *Elizabeth Gaskell's Mary Barton and Ruth: A Challenge to Christian England.* (Uppsala: Studia Anglistica Upsaliensia, 1982) 87-110, especially 90-97. It is acknowledged that Gaskell may have lifted some of the more didactic passages from both Buckland and Layhe's reports which Fryckstedt quotes. However it seems to this author that her descriptions prove her artistic intentions and ability. The use of diction, the piling up of adjectives and her use of italicised words for emphasis can be used to repudiate any whiff of plagiarism. The effects are achieved by poetic onomatopoeic words like 'fetid' and expressions such as 'damp nay wet brick floor.' The double adjectives of 'damp, muddy wall' and 'stagnant, filthy moisture' create a sense of personally experienced place. Smith covers Gaskell's achievement with regard to the realism of the physical

descriptions derived from published reports, because she had never seen such degradation, it seems unlikely that she could have written in such vivid terms unless she had experienced such conditions for herself.[156] As has been discussed above, documented sources confirm that Gaskell visited the poor although it appears impossible to discover exactly where she went.[157] The narrative perspective of the cellar scene derives not from an onlooker, spectator nor an outsider, but from the pen of a writer whose experience lies within the town. The socio-economic nuances of two contrasting cellars, which are only hundreds of yards apart, surely confirm that the source of her material was personal experience for such contrasts are difficult to ascertain from documented sources. The cellar scene parallels that of the Barton home which is good evidence of her personal experience of both types of home.

Alice, albeit poor, is in active employment. She works long hours to earn an income. Her cellar is unique in its cleanliness for its state is not determined totally by the

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environment in detail. Sheila Smith, 83-96. The most satisfactory conclusion to draw is that Gaskell used both her own imaginative creative powers based on her experience plus the Ministry of Poor Reports in order to obtain a truthful, Unitarian rather than ideologically based approach. Fryckstedt has a very good section on the relationship between Gaskell's Unitarianism and the portrait provided in the novel of such poor living conditions. Fryckstedt 92-106.

[156] Gaskell's description of the cellar is not didactic. Easson's view is that she is not a social reformer in this novel that endorses the point about the spatial manifestation of the rich:poor dichotomy. She is neither a polemicist nor an ideologue, she was concerned to 'write truthfully' . However it is true that social reformers like Edwin Chadwick produced very similar pictures to those of Gaskell. In his study published in 1842 on the *Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain.* He quotes Dr Howard's comments about Manchester: 'Whole streets in these quarters are unpaved and without drains or main sewers, are worn into deep ruts and holes in which water constantly stagnates and are so covered with refuse and excrementitous matter as to be almost impassable from depth of mud and intolerable from stench'. Edwin Chadwick, *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Gt. Britain, 1842* ed. M.W. Flinn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1965) 111. Gaskell had seen these conditions for herself when she went parochial visiting. It may be that as a visitor for the DPS she was allocated a district in the London Road area, or she accompanied Susanna Winkworth on her visits to this area. Susanna describes her position to her sister in1846, ' I still keep up my London Road District tho' I had fully intended to give it up. I have had more depositors, last month it was 22. My Ancoats district is almost beyond my management'. Winkworth, *Letters and Memorials* vol. I 107-108. Such experience is likely to have been Gaskell's as well, hence her familiarity with working class domestic interiors. It is also the details of this scene to which Marroni refers when he argues that the details provide the 'essence of the place', a perspective that Preston contends originates in her familiarity with the town. Marroni, trans. Liliana Smith 6 and Preston 35. However, as already noted commentators like Webb and Frykstedt considered that she derived much of the knowledge from reading. This commentator having found evidence to indicate that Gaskell did visit the poor tends to the former point of view. Webb is quoted in Nord 145.

[157] See page 31 of this chapter.

socio-economic conditions but is also the result of her self-determination. Like Alice Rose in *Sylvia's Lovers,* she wished to maintain a reputable home suggesting that whilst she may not be able to control her destiny, she is able to make a virtue of the state of her accommodation.

The source of Gaskell's information about cellars matters less than their role in the novel. She used the contrasting cellars not only to demonstrate the real socio-economic nuances that existed within Manchester at the time but also these dwellings were woven into the story to illustrate the underpinning theme of the novel that environment and character are inextricably linked.

Davenport is made redundant after Carson's mill fire. Despite valiant attempts to find work by long 'tramps', the coincidence of the fire with a trade recession meant that there was no work available. Consequently, Davenport and his family became trapped in the vicious circle of poverty. Without a job and income, food cannot be purchased, health declines as starvation ensues and eventually Davenport succumbed to typhus fever, which is 'virulent, malignant, and highly infectious'(*MB* 68). Despite the best efforts of his friends, once he fell ill his death was inevitable, for as Gaskell comments, 'the poor are fatalists with regard to infection'(*MB* 68). Although not depicted as feckless and improvident, Davenport's fatalistic view of typhus was typical of his class in that he felt that he had to 'bear patiently whate'er God sends' (*MB* 73). Davenport lost control of his destiny when he lost his job and despite his virtues, the environment was predominant in determining his fate. However, Gaskell credits him with virtues as Wilson testifies to his goodness and the fact that he was ' a steady, civil-spoken fellow though, [...] somewhat of a Methodee'(*MB* 72), on the walk between Barton's home and the Davenport cellar. This is a good example of Gaskell's use of the urban space not only for advancing the narrative but also for giving expression to theme. However, the tiny shred of evidence in the Wilson testimony suggests Davenport's Methodism might have been a factor alongside the prevailing physical and socio-economic conditions in determining his demise. The deterministic philosophy in evidence at this point in the narrative underpins much of

Gaskell's writing and will be highlighted throughout the discussion as events, circumstances and character are shown to be inextricably linked to the place.[158] In their attempt to help Davenport, Barton and Wilson generate narrative drive and increase the narrative pace of the story. Gaskell's story progresses as George Wilson collects John Barton from home and together they proceed to Berry Street to see what they can do to help their work-mate. The scene is an enactment of John Barton's comment 'no, it's the poor, and the poor only, as does such things for the poor'(*MB* 8). The scene of utter degradation and squalor, which confronts them, exemplifies the theme and galvanised John Barton into action. He told Wilson he would be back in half an hour [...] and he strode, ran and hurried home' in order to procure some pawnable items. 'He stopped nor stayed' until he reached the London Road shops 'not five minutes from Berry Street'. At this moment the pace slows as Barton 'loiters in order to discover what shops he wanted.' With limited resources and the need to buy the essentials of 'food light and warmth' he has to make judicious choices (*MB* 67).[159] Again Gaskell controls the narrative by inclusion of real streets and addresses so that the reader, whether familiar or not with Manchester, is given some sense of the reality of the plight of the working classes. Her use of first-hand experience and the real names may have contributed to the discomfort of some of those who criticised the novel so strongly when it was published. The real names make the reality unavoidable. Gaskell's control of narrative pace enables her to maximise the dramatic tension and reinforce the desperate plight of the Davenport family. As well as the necessities of life such as food light and fuel, Davenport requires medical treatment for typhus fever,[160] so George Wilson makes the two-mile walk to the Carson home to obtain an infirmary order. The reader accompanies the character as he walks into a

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158 In Marroni's chapter on 'Narrated Cities', there appears to be an acceptance that a deterministic philosophy underpinned both *Mary Barton* and *North and South.* Marroni, trans. Liliana Smith, 6; 13; 15.

159 Mannix demonstrates the realities of the retail area of London Road by mapping the outlets that could be found along the relevant stretch of this road. Mannix, 'Charting the City' 9.

160 All the reports of the period provided evidence of the inextricable and deterministic relationship between disease, water supply and living conditions.

scene of total contrast. The narrative juxtaposition of the Davenport cellar and the Carson home highlights the socio-economic chasm between them which is manifest in the town's geography as the reader follows Wilson from inner urban slum to peripheral, semi-rural luxurious abode. George Wilson's walk creates a sense of the realities of daily life in Manchester as well as maintaining the narrative drive as his route carries the reader into new territory to meet new characters. 'Wilson had about two miles to walk before he reached Mr Carson's house, which was almost in the country. The streets were not yet bustling and busy' (*MB* 74).

Gaskell's method of portrayal of the middle-class Carson home is completely different from the longer more documentary but sensual descriptions which she uses in the case of working class homes. All are written from 'deep within her experience of the town'[161] but this is the sort of environment with which she was familiar and 'at home' so she is able to convey ambiance and impression rather than concrete realism. Words and phrases such as 'much taste', 'lavish expenditure' and 'furnished with disregard to expense' and many articles chosen for their beauty and elegance which adorned his rooms create an impression of wealth and success without any hint of vulgarity (*MB* 74-75). The abundance and 'odours of appetising food' (*MB* 75) which assailed Wilson's senses contrasts markedly with the smells with which the two men were confronted in the Davenport home and the scene is far more reminiscent of Eagle's Crag at Abermouth than the Barton house-place.

The Streets of Manchester

Up to the dramatic event of Carson's mill fire and its consequences for Davenport the movement in the novel is localised and focused. However, the issues which are at the root of Davenport's death become bigger than the urban space of Manchester, as the Chartist movement grows. In his endeavours to make the 'higher folk' (*MB* 95) take cognisance of his view that there was a fundamental injustice in an economic system which created two such distinct separate groups as rich and poor, John Barton leaves

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[161] Preston 35.

Manchester twice. On neither occasion does the narrative move out of Manchester. Prior to his departure for London to present the People's Charter, Barton gathers friends and neighbours to his fireside to expound his own views and listen to others express their feelings about the gulf between masters and men. In a long somewhat didactic passage, Gaskell provides factual detail about economic conditions and 'tells' the reader about John Barton's Chartist views and role in the delegation:

> For three years past trade had been getting worse and worse and the price of provisions higher and higher. This disparity between the amount of the earnings of the working classes and the price of their food occasioned in more cases than could well be imagined, disease and death [...], the tremendous facts of the destitution that surrounded thousands upon thousands in the terrible years 1839, 1840 and 1841 [...] . The most deplorable and enduring evil that arose out of the period of commercial depression [...] was this feeling of alienation between different classes of society [...] so a petition was framed, [...] imploring Parliament to hear witnesses who could testify to the unparalleled destitution of the manufacturing districts. [...] delegates were life-worn [...] men. One of them was John Barton. (*MB* 97-8)

This change from active movement to narrative control is deliberate for three reasons. Gaskell wishes to provide realistic explanation for her reader. By the time she wrote *North and South* Gaskell had honed her narrative skills so that the majority of the educative process was interwoven into the narrative via dialogue rather didacticism. However, there may be another reason that is directly related to her artistic intentions and role as narrator. She wishes to maintain close control of the politico-economic theme that centred upon John Barton because she did not want to depict him committing the murder. Neither did she want to move the narrative to London. As a result, on one of the few occasions in the novel the scene shift is backwards in time and is controlled by the narrator rather than the movement of characters. From the Barton court the scene moves to the Carson home: 'I must now go back to an hour or two before Mary and her friends parted for the night' (*MB* 237). It is only the immediate aftermath of the murder and its consequences that are shown to the reader. Such parallel scenes are the exception and used sparingly and on few occasions as Gaskell rather than character movement generates the narrative drive. The murder

acts as a watershed in the plot and in the narrative drive of the novel. John Barton's presumed departure for Glasgow is the moment when Gaskell appeals to the reader, 'Let us leave him.' (*MB* 233). He is to re-appear only after Jem's acquittal and return to Manchester as a inactive shadow of his former self to remain at his cold bare fireside.

Running throughout the 'economic' thread of the plot which centres on John Barton is the 'domestic thread of Mary's romantic liaisons. In the early part of the novel as Gaskell seeks to establish these romantic liaisons, there is much character movement between the Barton and the Wilson homes which are about one mile apart. Having been preoccupied with her liaison with Harry Carson, she has been neglectful of Jane Wilson since her mother's death. She visits, feeling guilty, only to see Jem's baby brothers die and at that inappropriate moment, hears Jem declare his love for her. Despite rejection, Jem calls at the Barton home on two occasions to see Mary and renew his offer. The reader is aware that between these visits Sally Leadbitter, acting as go-between for Harry Carson, orchestrates secret meetings between the lovers. Whereas Mary meets Jem within the domestic environment, her planned meetings with Harry are outside in the street. The dramatic climax of their relationship takes place in a 'street of half-finished houses' that is, an unspecified but fairly long walk from her home: 'The length of the walk gave Mary time to recoil from the interview which was to follow' (*MB* 157) and the meeting place represents the social unacceptability of their relationship.

After the murder another pivotal, although unseen, moment in the narrative, the narrative drive becomes very strong as it is engendered by Mary's small-scale but frequent movements to and from her home to both work in Ardwick Green and to the Wilson home in Ancoats.[162] The increased strength of the narrative drive correlates well with Nord's observation that after the murder 'Mary is transformed from passive

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[162] Guest 92. Guest adds the point about the 'predictability' of Mary's movements as she goes to and from work and contends that 'Mary begins to experience a sense of persecution rather than freedom in the streets for Carson lies in ambush for her'. Although Guest does not provide textual evidence for her interpretation, the fact that Mary 'darted homewards in hopes of avoiding the person whom she was fast learning to dread' (*MB* 155) provides the reference necessary to endorse Guest's valid and useful observation.

subject [...] to the active agent of her own fate'.[163] In between the murder and her departure for Liverpool she visits Ancoats five times in three days. Prior to the murder, her visits to the Wilson's had been spasmodic; she visited the house only five times a much longer time span, despite the friendship between the two families which Gaskell firmly established in the first scene. The narrative drive is derived from Mary's journeys and the dramatic tension is maintained by her haste as she moved along the streets. These movements not only control the narrative pace but also by allowing her time for reflection, thought and feeling, they highlight her emotional state.

> She left Miss Simmonds' house, [...] gladly did she breathe in the fresh air, [...] Then, again, she reproached herself a little for the feeling of pleasure she experienced, in thinking that he whom she dreaded could never more beset her path; [...] Oh! beating heart! was there no other little thought of joy lurking within, to gladden the very air without? Was she not going to meet, to see, to hear Jem; and could they fail at last to understand each other's loving heart! (*MB* 265-266)

The streets of Manchester can be seen not only as conduits for the movement of characters but also are the spatial foci of action and represent social ostracism of relationship and individual because of profession.[164] Harry Carson's illicit and socially unacceptable liaison with Mary has been already been mentioned. Esther's profession as a prostitute is exemplified by that fact that when not languishing in the New Bailey Prison for vagrancy, she inhabits only the streets of Manchester when she is actively participating in the narrative. Although 'geographically marginalised'[165] she is far from peripheral to the plot and as she wanders in and out of the story-a movement appropriate to her profession-she generates narrative drive by appearing in chance and planned encounters on the streets of Manchester. She attempts to make

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[163] Nord 154. After rejecting Jem's admission of love for her, Mary 'who had fate in her power' (*MB* 152) felt she had lost control of it. Nord recognises the restoration of this power.

[164] Both Marroni and D'Albertis suggests that the streets are part of the design of the novel, although D'Albertis puts the emphasis on the moral design and symbolism, whereas Marroni highlights there topological and physical as well as social significance. D'Albertis 55; Marroni, trans. Liliana Smith 1.

[165] D'Albertis 158.

John aware of Harry Carson's overtures to his daughter whilst at the same time fostering the relationship between Jem and Mary.[166]

John Barton encountered her after a Trades Union meeting as he walks home in 'unceasing, soaking rain'.(*MB* 143) She pleaded to be listened to 'for Mary's sake' but he steadfastly refuses and 'flung her [...] from him, and strode away' (*MB* 143). She waits for Jem outside the foundry where he works, and tells him of the illicit love between Harry and Mary.[167] On her peregrinations around the streets she visited the site of the murder to find the scrap of valentine card used as 'wadding for the gun, [...] in the hedge' (*MB* 281-2). On one, of only two, visits to the Barton home, she revealed the incriminating evidence of John Barton's guilt to Mary. 'Geographically marginalised' she may be, strategically peripheral she is not.

Towards the end of the novel, Esther inhabits a 'low lodging-house behind Peter Street'.(See Fig.2.1)[168] Amongst critics, the received wisdom is that her fate is determined by economic necessity. Nord argues that Gaskell contests the view that Esther had some degree of self-determination. The critic is adamant that the novel represents Esther's fate as one 'created by society not decreed by nature or by some higher morality'.[169] However, alongside this reading it can be added that Esther acted altruistically because she did not wish Mary to share the same fate as herself.

Frederick, another peripheral and 'geographically marginalised' character plays an equally strategic role in the plot of *North and South* despite his walk-on part. Misunderstandings between Mr Thornton and Margaret as a result of Frederick's undisclosed appearance in Milton create dramatic tension in the romantic thread of

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[166] Nord, like Marroni, argues that these street encounters provide an element of narrative structure. 147.

[167] D'Albertis argues that Esther's planned encounters are a form of 'soliciting.' D'Albertis 53-54.

[168] The address is entirely appropriate for her demise. Oats' study of Deansgate demonstrated 'wretched' living conditions. Filth, pigsties, overcrowding were common and the southern area was a 'chief resort of thieves, prostitutes, dirt and drunkenness.' H.C. Oats, 'Inquiry into Education and other conditions of a district in Deansgate,' *Manchester Statistical Society* (1864). The northern boundary of the area is Peter Street. (See Fig.2.1)

[169] Nord 151-152. Pollard takes the same deterministic view about Ester's role. 'Her prostitution symbolises the blighting moral effect of the society in which she is found.' Pollard 57.

the narrative which are not resolved until the final scene. Frederick and Esther are essential to the narrative structure of their respective novels from their geographically peripheral locations.

Narrative Movement in Mary Barton

Although the sub-title of the novel is *A Tale of Manchester Life* and the narrative essentially nodal in structure, the action is not fixed in the town for the duration of the story. John Barton goes to London and Glasgow on behalf of his fellow workers, Margaret travels round Yorkshire on a singing tour, but there is only one axis along which the narrative follows the characters out of Manchester; and that is to Liverpool. Will, the most peripatetic, rootless and seemingly minor character in the novel, plays a crucial role in the plot and provides a strategic link in the story between Manchester and Liverpool. To demonstrate this narrative link Gaskell provides detail about his journey to the north-west port. He leaves his family unexpectedly, as his ship docked in Liverpool, is due to sail the following Tuesday and he has promised to visit his uncle in the Isle of Man. He has to walk the thirty miles to Liverpool because he cannot afford the third-class rail fare of three and sixpence. Such detail is characteristic and adds authenticity to the narrative. Even if she is not strictly accurate about cost Will would have travelled third-class.[170] She is also aware of the distance and the route of the railway although she had to correct place names in the second edition of the novel.[171] Hence a writer familiar with the route provides details of the journey to add authenticity. Will is accompanied by Jem for half the distance and it is Jem's return walk which provided the alibi for Harry Carson's murder.

However, the narrative moves from Manchester only when events determine the necessity for Mary to make the trip. The physical movement of the narrative to

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[170] Easson, notes, *Mary Barton* 419. There was only a second class fare at this time, which was 4s. Third class was introduced in 1844. At this time the second class fare had increased to 5s. Gaskell knew the fare so clearly there was some familiarity with the railway from Manchester to Liverpool. The Assizes were held in the first two weeks of August. Therefore Mary would have been travelling on August 1st 1842. The Monday morning train started at 7am. The journey took one and three quarter hours, therefore the passengers were in Liverpool by 9am.

[171] Easson, notes, *Mary Barton* 426.

another townscape heightens the drama but it was essential for two realistic reasons. First, Jem's trial had to be held in Liverpool for Manchester had no Assize court at that time.[172] Secondly, Will's promised visit to his uncle in the Isle of Man meant he had gone to Liverpool, earlier than necessary. Having realised the depth of feeling that she has for Jem, Mary is determined to establish his alibi. Therefore, in order to be realistic and dramatic Gaskell had to move the narrative from Manchester to Liverpool.

Gaskell's Liverpool

Underestimated, if acknowledged at all by critics, Liverpool is integrated into the narrative and it represents a widening of Mary's horizons, as this is the first time she has left the confines of Manchester. The journey is also a literary first. Mary was the first heroine in a novel to travel by train.[173] In terms of the story this is significant because Gaskell introduces another means of transport as the distances to be covered were far greater than the square mile of Manchester. Although characters who travel by train may be a novelty in the literature of the time, Gaskell demonstrates that she took it for granted: 'Common as railroads are now in all places as a means of transit, and especially in Manchester, Mary had never been on one before [...] ' (*MB* 332). These evocations demonstrate her familiarity with train travel, railways and ' the hurry the noise of people, [...] and the whiz and scream of trains' on railway stations.' (*MB* 332). However the experience 'bewildered Mary' just as the 'half-finished streets' of the town bewildered the narrator at the opening of the story. Gaskell seeks to make the point that unfamiliarity with a place can create a sense of bewilderment. However, Manchester was already a railway town when Gaskell arrived in 1832 and in the years up the writing of the novel, several more lines converged on the town and

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[172] Love, 267 Manchester did not have Assize courts until 1864.

[173] Wendy Craik suggests that the whole perspective of the novel is from Manchester. This may be one interpretation of the novel but it ignores the fact 20% of the action takes place in Liverpool. W.A. Craik, *Elizabeth Gaskell and the English Provincial Novel* (London: Methuen, 1975) 6.

more stations were built.[174] Gaskell would have become familiar with the journey between Manchester and Liverpool from visits to her sister-in-law Eliza who lived in Hope Street, Liverpool and from the occasions before her marriage when she returned from North Wales via Liverpool. She uses her both her knowledge and experience of the train ride to portray the landscape and landmarks on Mary's route. Two stopping places are mentioned. The first is Chat Moss, an extensive, utterly flat landscape of lowland peat which having been reclaimed , is a fertile and productive rural area. Newton, a village halfway along the line was 'picturesque'.[175] Added to the realism of the journey is the anticipation of arrival. Gaskell incorporates dramatic tension into the text as the train enters the tunnel just outside Liverpool. 'And now they were in the tunnel! – and now they were in Liverpool' (*MB* 334).

The repetition in this short sentence encapsulates the movement as Mary approaches this unfamiliar place. The merest of pauses is denoted by the hyphen indicates the short distance through the tunnel and into Liverpool itself. The exclamation mark represents the anticipation of arrival and the repetition of the phrase, 'and now they were' (*MB* 334) represents the rhythmic movement of the train. The tunnel also marked a dramatic moment on the journey for the steep gradient necessitated a tunnel and haulage of the train up the incline.[176] The narrative proceeds as the train makes its progress towards Liverpool. As already noted throughout the journey, Mary sat facing her home town. On arrival, the narrative moves forward and gathers pace as Mary searches for the house 'not far from the (Liverpool) Docks' (*MB* 334) in which Will was staying.

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[174] Manchester has a railway as early as 1830 and by 1844 there was major expansion of the network with new stations in the town. e.g. Victoria Station was opened in 1844. Easson suggests that Mary may have used this station when she went to Liverpool. Easson, notes, *Mary Barton* 423.

[175] I Shaw, *Views of the Most Interesting Scenery on the Line of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway* Facsimile of the original edition 1831 (Oldham: Broadbent, 1980) 11.

[176] Just outside Liverpool there was a short tunnel between Edgehill and Crown Street that was Liverpool's railway station. The incline was steep and the trains required rope haulage to reach the terminus. Shaw 18. Easson, notes, *Mary Barton* 424.

In Liverpool, to add further authenticity, Gaskell uses a mix of identifiable locations and both real and fictitious addresses in Liverpool, a technique similar to that which she employed in her portrayal of Manchester. It is likely, of course, that she checked locational detail carefully as she was less familiar with the town. To some extent though, Gaskell creates her own spatially restricted map of Liverpool, circumscribed by the focus of action, so that the narrative only extends just beyond the docks and the central core into the working class residential area. (See fig.2.13)

'Milk-house Yard out of Nicholas Street' (*MB* 307) is typical of the courts that characterised the high density working class residential areas of urban landscapes at the time, indeed, it bears a resemblance to the Barton court although it lacks the realistic detail of 'strings' of 'half-wet clothes flapping in their faces' (*MB* 12). The difference may be testimony to the fact that Gaskell had seen the Barton court for herself whereas Liverpool was less familiar. She locates it close to the docks although the two Milk-house Yards, which existed in Liverpool at the time, were further from the river and were not 'out of Nicholas Street'.[177] (See Fig.2.13) However, the urban morphology of Liverpool indicates that Gaskell's juxtaposition of commercial docks and the homes of the working population is also accurate even if the addresses do not match reality and meant some telescoping of distance. Job Legh stayed waiting for Mary at 8, Back Garden Court, another apparently unmappable address.[178] However, the fact that it is a 'court' implies that it, like Milkhouse yard, lies within the zone of working class homes.

The home of the 'old boatman', Sturgis, to which Mary was taken after the river chase, is clearly located in one of the oldest parts of Liverpool but is spatially non-specific so

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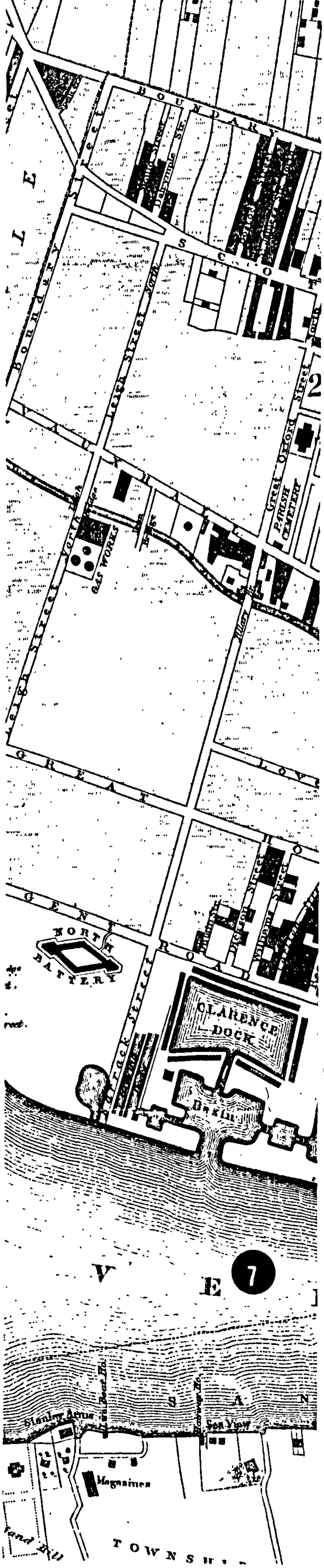
[177] Louise Oakes, letter to the author, 24 Dec. 1996. Louise Oakes works in the Liverpool City Library Archive department. I am very grateful for her invaluable help. Her source is *Gore's Directory and Views of Liverpool and Environs* (Liverpool, 1845). In 1842, there were at least four 'Milkhouse' addresses although they were not all Milkhouse Yards. The name may therefore have been familiar. Easson, letter to the author, 20 Nov. 1996.

[178] There is no trace of Back Garden Court in *Gore's Directory for* 1832; 1838; 1841 or 1845. Easson, notes, *Mary Barton* 425. Courts were often built in the back gardens of large houses as land was sold off for higher density housing as the urban population increased.



1. 41, RENSHAW STREET –
   Meeting place of *Mary* and *Mr Bridgnorth*, the lawyer.

2. MILKHOUSE YARD – 'out of *Nicholas Street' Will's* lodgings in Liverpool

3. LIVERPOOL EXCHANGE AND NELSON'S MONUMENT
   Charley's pride in his native town was evident

4. ASSIZE COURT – *Location of Jem's trial*

5. POSSIBLE LOCATION OF THE *STURGIS* HOME – *where Mary recovered after the boat journey and the trial.*

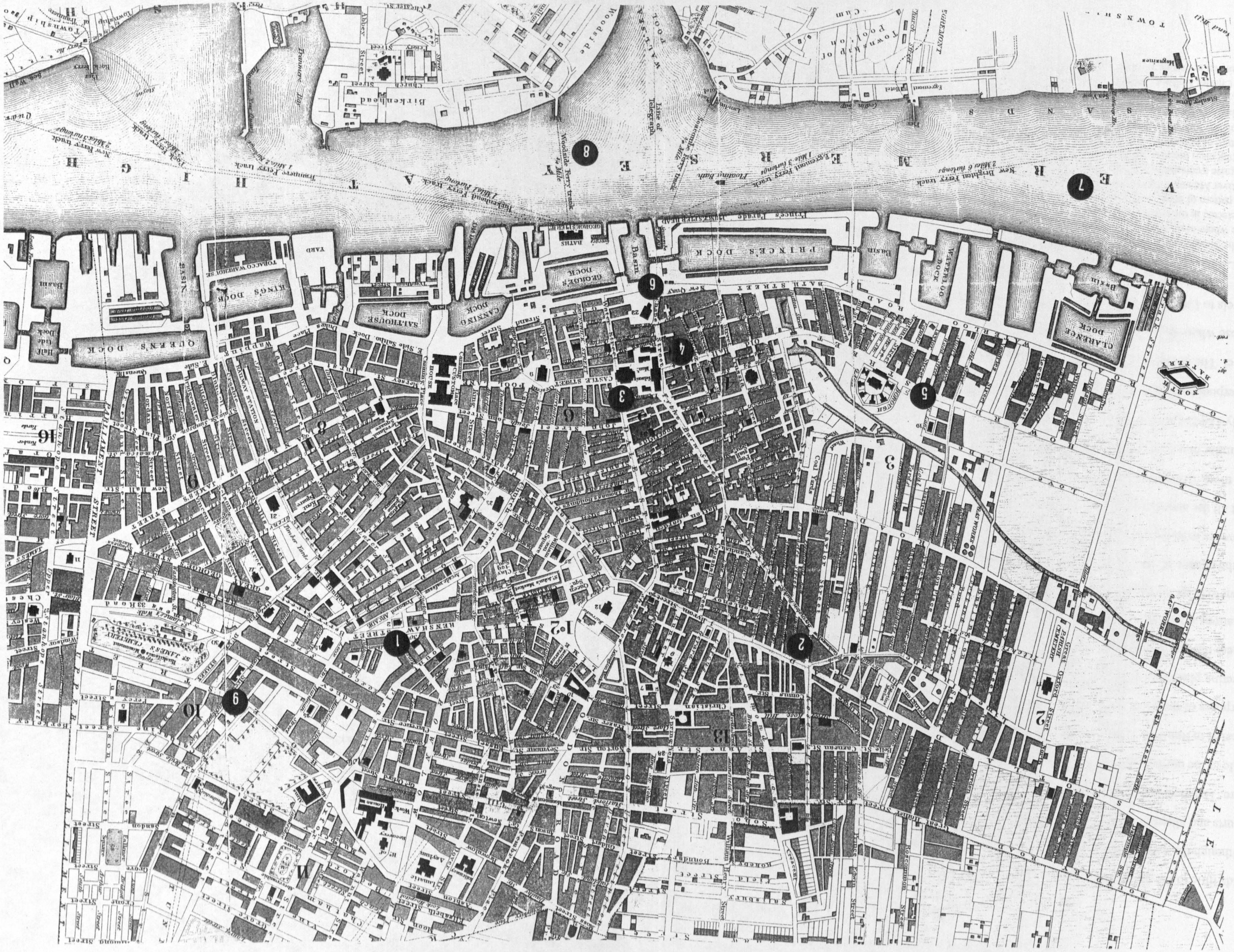
6. St GEORGE'S DOCK
   PRINCE'S DOCK –
   Inspiration for the 'magnificent' dock

7. BOAT JOURNEY ALONG THE MERSEY
   moments of dramatic tension

8. WOODSIDE FERRY –
   Gaskell was familiar with the ferry from days spent in Birkenhead

9. 27 HOPE STREET- Eliza Gaskell's home

Fig 2.13 Map of Liverpool and its Environs 1836
Source: Liverpool City Library Archive Department


1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
Woodside Ferry track
Woodside Ferry Boat
Line of Telegraph
Pumping Shaft
Abbey Street
Church Street
Birkenhead
Woodside
Egremont Ferry track
Egremont Ferry Boat
Egremont Pier
Seacombe Ferry Boat
Seacombe Ferry track
Liverpool Ferry track
Tobacco Warehouse
Yard
Kings Dock
Queens Dock
Half tide Dock
Basin
Salthouse Dock
Canning Dock
George's Dock
George's Pier Head
Prince's Dock
Prince's Parade
Basin
Wellington Dock
Clarence Dock
Bath Street
New Quay
Castle Street
Exchange Buildings
Custom House
Commercial Buildings
Old Dock
Dale Street
Lord Street
Church Yard
Williamson Square
Clayton Square
Ranelagh Street
Renshaw Street
Bold Street
Hope Street
Parliament Street
Duke Street
Gerard Street
Hardman Street
Rodney Street
Mount Pleasant
Upper Parliament Street
Lower Parliament Street
Prince's Road
Princes Park
Toll Bar
Toll Bar Cottages
Toll Bar Office
Toll Bar Office
Toll Bar Office

adds little to the geography of the port.[179]

Although the urban landscape of Liverpool resembles that of Manchester in having courts and alleys, it differs from it in having a well-realised spatially specific central core. The most precise address is 41, Renshaw Street. A real street, it is located one mile to the north of the docks. One of the two Unitarian chapels in Liverpool was located in Renshaw Street, which would have been familiar to Gaskell.[180] For the purposes of the novel, it was the location of Mr Bridgnorth's offices, and was to be the meeting place for Job and Mary prior to the trial. Its distance from the Sessions House where the trial was held engendered narrative drive as movement between the two locations across the central area was necessary. Mary failed to cross that part of the town to keep her appointment in Renshaw Street thus increasing the dramatic tension as the climax of the trial scene is approached. Consideration of these addresses provides evidence that Gaskell has telescoped the urban morphology of Liverpool so that all the action occurs close to the docks and within the central commercial core of the town. Liverpool's centre, although older than that of Manchester, would have had a similar mix of public, commercial and residential land use in the late 1830's and early 1840's.(See Fig. 2.13)

Liverpool possesses a commercial and public face not seen in the Manchester of the novel. The docks and public buildings, like the Liverpool Exchange and the Sessions House where the Assizes are held, dominate Liverpool's urban landscape. When Mary travels to Liverpool she is moving from a domestic, 'private realm' into the 'public

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[179]The Sturgis home was in a 'bustling back street' but it had a 'country-town' look about it. It is the place where Mary recovers from her ordeal and perhaps a sense of denial of the urban environment can be detected in the context of this house.

The pattern of urban morphology in Liverpool is distorted because of its location along the banks of the River Mersey. Parallel to the river is a corridor of docks. Beyond the docks it is possible to recognise a concentric ring structure but it is truncated by the river with the result that high-density working class housing is found cheek-by-jowl with the docks. The pattern is different from the urban structure of Manchester, but Gaskell seems sufficiently aware of its nuances to provide a realistic if not completely mappable topography.

[180] Gaskell's uncle, Samuel Holland, lived in Toxteth Park, a salubrious area on the periphery of the town. He worshipped at Renshaw Street. Eliza Gaskell, Elizabeth's sister-in-law, married a cousin of hers, Charles Holland, and they lived at 27, Hope Street Liverpool where it is likely Gaskell stayed. She had an invitation in 1838. *Letters* 39. (See Fig.2.13)

realm' of a trial. If this view is accepted, it could be argued that the public buildings of Liverpool's C.B.D. appear to symbolise this public world. Once again then, plot, character and environment are inextricably linked. The argument can be taken further. Liverpool's chief function was commercial whereas Manchester was both commercial and manufacturing town. As Liverpool was the point of entry for imported raw cotton used in the textile mills of Manchester there were inextricable commercial links as the two towns traded with each other. Liverpool Exchange, like its counterpart in Manchester was the building in which the manufacturers traded raw cotton, located in the heart of the C.B.D. Therefore, it symbolises these commercial links and explains Charley's pride when he points it out to Mary:

> I heard you say to mother that you had never been in Liverpool before, and if you'll only look up this street you may see the back windows of our Exchange. Such a building as yon is! with 'natomy hiding under a blanket, and Lord Admiral Nelson and a few more people in the middle of the court! No! come here,' as Mary, in her eagerness was looking at any window that caught her eye first to satisfy the boy. 'Here then, now you can see it. You can say, now, you've seen the Liverpool Exchange (*MB* 340).

However, there may be another reason why the central public face of Liverpool is portrayed. Strangers tend to gravitate to the central core of a town and with Charley as a guide Mary was privy to all Charley's civic pride as he showed her the public buildings. There are parallels here with Gaskell's guide to Milton-Northern where she also focuses initially on the public rather than the domestic sphere as Margaret and her father are strangers to Milton-Northern. For Gaskell as author, the public buildings of Liverpool provided landmarks around which she could build her limited and rather telescoped geography of the port. Out of this partly real, partly imaginative urban space she could drive the narrative forward. Gaskell's methodology endorses the literary-spatial links that characterises her work.

From a number of clues given and Charley and Mary's mappable route through the streets of Liverpool, either Princes or George's Dock probably inspired the

'magnificent' dock.[181] Both docks are centrally located between the C.B.D and the river. (See Fig. 2.13) To Mary the sight of 'gliding [...] white sailed ships, the forest of masts [...] loading and unloading and great bales' on hoists was 'an entire novelty' (*MB* 340 and 341) despite the fact that Manchester stands on two rivers. Neither the Irwell nor the Medlock are the 'glorious, glittering' seagoing 'highways' like the Mersey. (*MB* 341). The piling up of adjectives demonstrates Liverpool's great commercial success as a port. Curiously, although the river plays a dramatically crucial role in the action, Gaskell never mentions the name of the river. She must have known it well from her spells in Birkenhead when she frequently used the ferry from Woodside to Liverpool.[182](See Fig.2.13) What is more important than the name is the fact that she puts her detailed knowledge of places along the river, of the tides and channel topography to good use in creating dramatic tension as Mary is rowed down river to reach Will's ship before it sails.

Gaskell does not vary her narrative technique in the Liverpool chapters. From the moment that Mary sets foot in Liverpool the narrative is driven by her determination to establish an alibi for Jem having located Will. Although, initially apparently thwarted and in despair, Mary is galvanised into action by Charley, whose energetic enthusiasm and maritime knowledge enables her to find Will after complicated travels. In their contrasting ways, the runs through the streets of Liverpool, the boat journey and the court scene provide varieties of type and speed of movement which govern narrative pace and provide dramatic tension throughout these chapters which focus on the 'domestic' strand of the novel. For the time being John Barton and the

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[181] George's Dock was the one into which the ferry from Woodside docked, and steamers to North Wales left from both these docks. C.F. Cliffe, *The Book of North Wales* 2nd ed. (London,1851) 14-15. Gaskell would have been familiar with this whole area of dockside. (See Fig.2.13)

[182] Gaskell spent the summer of 1831 in Woodside, on the opposite bank of the Mersey from Liverpool. Chapple makes it clear in his account of this period that with friends and relations, she 'took pleasant sails up and down the Mersey and made little trips over the broad river to Liverpool.' Therefore she developed a familiarity with the river and its topography which strengthened the realistic portrait she painted in *Mary Barton.* However if she perceived the river as broad, it may have existed imaginatively rather like the sea, hence the omission of the river's name. (Of course, this is mere speculation). Chapple, *The Early Years* 344.

socio-economic concerns of Manchester have been left behind at the end of the railway line.

The manner in which Charley and Mary make their way to the docks increases the narrative pace and builds dramatic tension as Charley 'scuds' along 'closely followed by Mary's half-running steps' (*MB* 339). However, the irrepressible Charley can contain neither his curiosity nor his pride so the pace slows slightly whilst he questions and acts as guide to the sights of Liverpool. The authenticity and realism is derived from the spatial accuracy and mappability of their route. (See Fig.2.13) The dramatic tension continues as Mary, having hired a boat, had only an hour to reach Will before the tide had risen sufficiently to permit his ship to cross the bar at the mouth of the channel. 'He hurried them (Charley and Mary) away to seek for a boat, saying the bar was already covered, and in an hour the ship would hoist her sails, and be off' (*MB* 343). It was Charley's awareness of the sandbanks at the mouth of the Mersey that initiated Mary's hope of reaching Will. 'I did not say he'd sailed; mother said that [...] 'You see there's sandbanks at the mouth of the river and ships can't get over them but at high water; especially ships of heavy burden like the *John Cropper'* (*MB* 338). Charley's observations are absolutely accurate, the Mersey estuary was notoriously dangerous.[183] Gaskell used a similar situation in *Sylvia's Lovers* in which the channel morphology of the River Dee controlled the arrival of the whaling fleet and contributed to the dramatic tension of the beginning of the novel.[184] In that instance, the heroine did not take to a boat and give chase, as Mary did, but then Gaskell never set out to sea during her holiday in Whitby, whereas she had personal knowledge of trips along the Mersey.[185] After hasty but protracted negotiations at the dockside, 'Mary was rocking and tossing in a boat for the first time in her life' (*MB*

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[183] 'The history of the outer estuary during the first of the nineteenth century is largely a confused record of shifting sandbanks, wayward channels, uncharted dangers and grave anxiety about them.' J.E.Allison *The Mersey Estuary* (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 1949) 41-42.

[184] Elizabeth Gaskell, *Sylvia's Lovers* 14.

[185] Winkworth, *Letters and Memorials* vol. I 165. Catherine writes: 'The journey home was very wet and rough and Emily was very ill though Mrs Gaskell and Marianne did not suffer at all.

345). For the second time that day, she was experiencing a mode of transport entirely new to her. However the rocking and tossing of the boat was less rhythmic than that of the train. These moments are important because they offer a contrast to the narrative drive engendered by urban street walking.

Even though the name of the river is not given, the authenticity of the scene on the Mersey can be measured by references to real places passed on route. 'But now she grew sure they were turning from the straight course which they had hitherto kept on the Cheshire side of the river [...] yet Liverpool appeared still close at hand' (*MB* 346). Throughout the scene the dramatic tension and narrative pace depends upon the elements and navigation in the channel which influence the progress of shipping. Favourable wind changes assist the boat on its journey increasing the pace of its progress as it drops and backs to a 'keen, gusty east wind' (*MB* 347) which meant it would have been blowing the vessel seawards along the river. However, this wind also favoured Will's ship so, as Mary's craft 'sped along under sail in the spirit of the chase', the *John Cropper* weighed anchor. The oarsmen 'hoisted their oars' (*MB* 347) to arrest attention but such was the active movement on board the ship, initially, they failed. Eventually Will appeared and promised to return on the pilot boat. Dispute amongst the oarsmen about distances travelled by the pilots dashed Mary's' hopes of obtaining Will's evidence in time for the trial.

> 'How far does the pilot go with the ship?'
> 'To different distances they said. Some pilots would go as far as Holyhead for the chance of homeward-bound vessels; others only took the ships over the Banks.' (*MB* 350)

Mary's despair is symbolised by the reduction of narrative pace as the boatmen make slow progress rowing and tacking on the return journey. The narrative pace inevitably slows as they row into the wind taking the action back to the land and the trial. It will be seen in the following chapters that dramatic tension and narrative pace are controlled and determined by Gaskell's detailed knowledge of the physical environment. The scene on the river here is highly reminiscent of scenes in the littoral zone of Monkshaven in *Sylvia's Lovers.*

Apart from this scene and Charley's runs around Liverpool to try to locate Mary, interior scenes dominate the Liverpool phase of the story, the climax of which is reached with Jem's trial. Just she did in the Davenport cellar, Gaskell demonstrates that the stillness of the interior scene can generate dramatic tension as effectively as rapid movements outside. The narrative drive at the trial is derived from the 'stream of evidence'(*MB* 379) given by those who stand in the witness box.

Dominating the narrative in Liverpool is Mary and her search for Will, a search which is telescoped in time to one day but which occupies eight and a half chapters of the novel. Jem's acquittal causes Mary's collapse as the strain and tension is released. She spends days at the Sturgis house recovering whilst Jem engenders renewed narrative drive by going backwards and forwards to Manchester where 'all his duties lay' (*MB* 411).

As Mary's gradually recovers, she expresses a wish to return *home* to Manchester.

The authorial control over the urban geography of Liverpool and the topography of the river scene which enables Gaskell to build and maintain dramatic tension and vary narrative pace indicates familiarity with the port and a belief in the inextricable link between human beings and the environment.

After Mary's return to Manchester the betrothed couple join in discussions and walk to and from Ancoats as John Barton's reappearance attracts the narrative to his home once again. The economic and domestic strands are drawn together as John faces death and Carson through his experience on the streets of the town forgives John for the death of his son. When returning home from his first visit to the Barton home after the murder of his son, Carson, unusually on foot, saw an accident in which the victim immediately forgave the perpetrator. When Carson heard the words of the little girl who had been knocked down, '*he did not know what he was doing*' (*MB* 434), the scales fell from the manufacturer's eyes. This particular but un-named Manchester street became Carson's 'road to Damascus' so he returned to forgive Barton as the weaver lay dying. Carson appropriately took the Gospel text, 'They know not what they do'(*MB* 436) as the expiation for Barton's sin. Carson in this scene became an

urban spectator and the street, acting as a conduit of movement, became the place of dramatic action and the focus of a turning-point in the narrative.

Finally, in full control of her narrative at the end of *Mary Barton,* Gaskell telescopes time and distance as the urban space of Manchester has been abandoned in favour of the 'New World'. Although some critics have suggested that the resolution of the injustice of Manchester's politico-economic system must be achieved *within* the confines of its urban space, there are also as many interpretations of the resolution of the novel as there are commentators.[186] However, from the evidence of the text neither Jem nor Mary had total control over their destinies, and their social unacceptability to the inhabitants of Manchester meant a 'new' beginning in a 'new' place, a destiny entirely consistent with the philosophy which underpins the text. Right up until the end Gaskell's thematic intentions have a spatial dimension and this preference for a move away from the urban environment echoes that of Dickens, as Wright and Moretti have pointed out.[187] The abandonment of Manchester's urban space symbolises the ignorance of the remaining workers who failed to accept Mary and Jem who, to some extent, were victims of the socio-economic and political system. The space was physically abandoned too, for not only do Jem and Mary leave, but the reader has to make a leap in both time and space, to join the couple and their children in 'the New World' as the axis of the plot moves across the Atlantic.

North and South

Contrasts of interior domestic space exist within *North and South* but they are of a different nature from those in *Mary Barton* and do not extend beyond social class. Thornton's home, which is contrasted with that of Margaret Hale, epitomises its matriarch in its cold forbidding, concealed yet handsome appearance. Mrs Thornton occupies one isolated corner of the 'handsome ponderous' dining room where she

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[186] Wright, introduction, *Mary Barton* xvi. See also footnote 236. Hilary M. Schor, *Scheherezade in the Marketplace: Elizabeth Gaskell and the Victorian Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) 37.

[187] Wright xvi: Moretti 120.

sews, entertains and reads: 'There was not a book about in the room, with the exception of Matthew Henry's Bible Commentaries, six volumes of which lay in the centre of the massive side-board, flanked by a tea-urn on one side, and a lamp on the other' (NS 76-7).

The upstairs drawing room, which was normally concealed beneath covers and linen drugget to preserve its finery, revealed the 'yellow silk damask' furniture coverings, 'brilliantly-flowered carpet' and abundant ornaments which 'became a weariness to the eye' (*NS* 160). Her own drawing room was not 'twenty times as fine as that of Mrs Thornton but it was 'comfortable' (*NS* 78-9). Ostensibly seen through Mr Thornton's eyes, Gaskell cannot resist a long set-piece description of the room, perhaps because she was describing a much-loved familiar room:

> Here were no mirrors, not even a scrap of glass to reflect the light, and answer the same purpose as water in a landscape; no gilding; a warm, sober breadth of colouring, well relieved by the dear old Helstone chintz-curtains and chair covers. An open davenport stood in the window opposite the door; in the other there was a stand, with a tall white china vase, from which drooped wreaths of English ivy, pale green birch and copper coloured beech-leaves. Pretty baskets of work stood about in different places and books, not cared for on account of their binding solely, lay on one table as if recently put down. Behind the door was another table, decked out for tea, with a white table-cloth on which flourished the cocoa-nut cakes, and a basket piled high with oranges and ruddy American apples heaped on leaves.' (*NS* 79)

The contrast with the books that adorned the side-board in the Thornton dining room, the hint of the countryside in the leaves and plants and the ground floor plan, conveys to the reader shabby comfort, a rural link and a thoughtful caring touch in addition to highlighting a connection with Helstone from which the Hales had so recently moved.

These two middle-class domestic spaces form two of the apexes of the triangle on which the narrative structure is founded.

In contrast to all the detail of these middle-class homes, there are few details of the domestic space of Higgins' working class home. Nevertheless, the 'small court' in a 'squalid' street forms an important third apex of the triangular organisation of Milton-Northern's urban space.

Although it is not possible to provide geographical orientation, real locations and distances for *North and South,* the sides of the organisational triangle are represented by social familial interchanges. The frequency of their movements can be shown diagrammatically by means of flow lines. (See Fig 2.14)

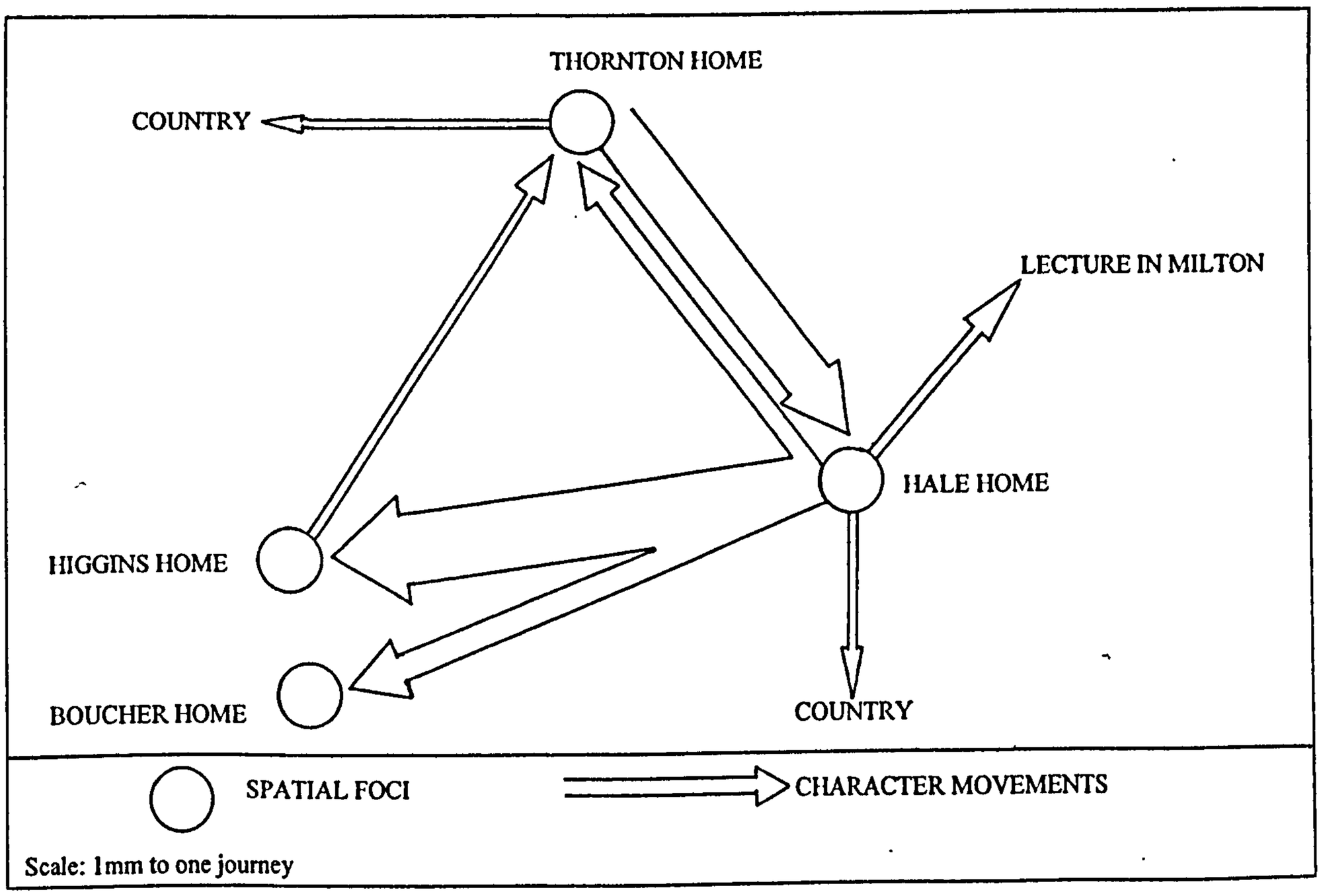

Fig.2.14 Flow Line Diagram of Character Movements in *North and South*

This visual representation highlights the spatial and organisational structure of the novel. The movements which occur on foot through the busy, crowded streets of Milton serve to generate and maintain the narrative drive of the middle two thirds of the novel, a methodology similar to that used in *Mary Barton* and one which is entirely appropriate to its linear narrative.

Out of the intimidating crowds Margaret encountered on these streets one 'poorly-dressed, middle-aged careworn looking man' stood out, and between him, his daughter, Bessy, and Margaret there developed a friendship (*NS* 72). Through Margaret's frequent visits to Higgins' home and Higgins' two visits to Crampton,

Margaret was educated about Milton, its cotton industry, and the relationships between masters and men from a working class perspective. In addition to social convention, which dictated that the Thorntons and the Hales exchanged visits, Mr Thornton was a frequent visitor to the Hale home as a pupil. A self-made man who was forced to provide a family income early in life due to the death of his father, he was anxious to continue his curtailed, classical and formal education.

Through dialogue Gaskell interweaves the thematic content without recourse to the authorial didacticism which appeared more frequently in her first novel, especially when she was presenting the politico-economic arguments.

Gaskell believed that much of the misunderstanding which arose between the employers and those they employed stemmed from ignorance, a view held by many observers at the time and expressed in both *Mary Barton* and *North and South.* Stephen Gill acknowledges that part of Gaskell's intention was 'to dispel' this ignorance.[188] By the exposition of the issues through social interaction – engendered by character movement between the spatial foci – and dialogue across the class divide, Gaskell was able to demonstrate how education played a significant role in solving the problems. Thornton's visits to Crampton, engendered both by his mother's imperatives or his own desire to further his education, provided opportunities for Margaret and her father to learn about Milton, its economy and employer-employee relationships. Once Margaret had become familiar with Higgins' point of view, she was able to challenge Thornton's perspective of the impending strike.

> 'But we Milton masters have today sent in our decision. We won't advance a penny. We tell them we may have to lower wages; but we can't afford to raise. So here we stand, waiting for their next attack'.
> 'And what will that be?' asked Mr Hale.
> 'I conjecture a simultaneous strike. You will see Milton without smoke in a few days, I imagine, Miss Hale.'
> 'But why,' asked she, 'could you not explain what good reason you have for expecting a bad trade? I don't know whether I use the right words, but you understand what I mean'.

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[188] Stephen Gill, ed. *Mary Barton* by Elizabeth Gaskell (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975) 15.

> 'Do you give your servants reasons for your expenditure [...] . We, the owners of capital have the right to choose what we will do with it.'
> 'A human right,' said Margaret very low. (*NS* 117)

The dialogue continues as Mr Thornton says he would be happy to explain 'all that may seem anomalous or mysterious to her' (*NS* 118), so Margaret mentions the antagonism which appears to exist between the two classes, saying 'that she has never lived in place where two sets of people were always running each other down' (*NS* 117). Thornton's lengthy attempt to present and justify his perspective in this scene is counterbalanced subsequently when Higgins explains Boucher's plight to Margaret before the strike. This occurs on an occasion when Margaret has gone to visit Bessy, having changed her mind about a visit to the country, thus maintaining the narrative drive of the novel. After the strike, and Bessy's death, Margaret visits Higgins and spontaneously asks him home. In the long conversation over tea Higgins is able to explain to them his perspective on the strike and its consequences in terms of employment. (NS 223-5) Thus Margaret and her father learn and, in turn, educate Mr Thornton and Higgins about the alternative point of view through the social interactions between them. Finally it is Margaret who encourages Higgins to approach Thornton for employment. Unfamiliar as she is with the place, its people and its economy, via her social visiting of both masters and 'hands' and motivated by her belief in innate human understanding, Margaret acts as a conduit of information as she attempted to mitigate the ignorance which she encountered. To do this she has to move between the three domestic spheres so that these foci in conjunction with the streets that link them are the spatial manifestation of Margaret's role.

However, not all her attempts to inform and educate were conducted in the subdued enclosed 'civilised' realms of a domestic interior. Her dramatic appearance at the strike demonstration at Marlborough Mill, the epitome of Harman's 'public realm,' [189] diffused a potentially riotous event. It also raised Thornton's romantic aspirations and expectations although, these were dispelled in the immediate

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[189] Harman 358.

aftermath of the demonstration. However, Thornton's visits to Crampton did not cease despite Margaret's rejection, although the concerns and consequences of strike prevented his pursuing his formal education so regularly. Having learnt via a chance encounter in the street with Dr Donaldson of Mrs Hale's illness, 'he went straight to the first fruit-shop in Milton and chose out the bunch of purple grapes with the most delicate bloom upon them, -the richest coloured peaches,- the freshest vine leaves [...] .' In order to reach the Hales 'he had to pass through the busiest part of the town for feminine shopping [...] . He went at an unusual pace, [...] ' (*NS* 214) having refused to have the fruit delivered by carrier. These visits to enquire of her health were maintained. Mrs Thornton also visited Crampton to act as surrogate mother to Margaret on the death of Mrs Hale, so these links between these two homes continued throughout the narrative despite events.

The vivid picture Gaskell paints of the shopping area of Milton in the passage quoted above is one instance of the writer's use of euphemism to preserve the fictional nature of the town. The significance of the unidentified 'area of feminine shopping' [190] lies less in its actual location but more in its symbolic role, for it highlights the trouble and effort made by Thornton to present Margaret's invalid mother with the best fruit available. It is a good example of Gaskell's use of euphemistic space to create a seemingly realistic geography. It is also possible that her contemporary middle-class readership would have recognised the reference.

One side of the structural triangle of *North and South* is under-represented. There is only one major movement in each direction between the homes of Higgins, the mill operative and Thornton, the manufacturer. However this two-way movement it is not absent altogether, which it might have been given Gaskell's emphasis on the level of ignorance between these two groups. However, the interchange was crucial to the narrative design, as Gaskell wants to portray the manufacturers in a more positive light. With Margaret's encouragement, Higgins goes to Marlborough Mill to request

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[190] Wyke, letter to the author, May 1999.

work from Thornton himself, who rather abruptly refuses. After due reflection and in the knowledge that Higgins patiently waited five hours for him, Thornton changed his mind and went to Higgins' home to inform him that a job was available. Consequently there are subsequently numerous movements between Higgins' home and the mill but they do not actively move the narrative on because the reader does not follow him daily to work.

It is clear from the foregoing discussion that lessons had been learnt largely through the triangle of interchange between these three domestic spheres because communication had been opened up by Margaret's desire to learn about her new environment, Thornton's desire for self-improvement, and Higgins appreciation of, and trust in, Margaret's friendship. The theme of self-determination is evident here, testimony to Gaskell's underpinning philosophy of character-environment links. These social interchanges which have a spatial manifestation are paralleled in *Mary Barton.* However, in her first novel they are not successful in fostering better inter-social class relations. In terms of breaking down the barriers of ignorance between himself and workers, Thornton had one great advantage over Carson. A product of the free-trade philosophy of many Manchester manufacturers, his views were more libertarian than those of Carson, although he was motivated by a puritan work ethic. As an employer he felt that he had some responsibility to his workers, because he was aware that if his business was to succeed he needed their labour. Equally he knew that unless his business was profitable, the workers would be 'laid off'. The contrasting views of the two men are manifest spatially in the townscapes of the novels. Margaret and Mr Hale on their first visit to Marlborough Street were perplexed by the 'long rows of small houses' that constituted the street.

> 'Perhaps it is one of the economies he still practices, to live in a very small house [...] . 'let me ask.'
> She accordingly inquired of a passer-by, and was informed that Mr Thornton lived close to the mill [...].
> The lodge-door was like a common garden-door; on one side of it were great closed gates for the ingress and egress of lurries and wagons. The lodge-keeper admitted them into a great oblong yard, on one side of which were

> offices [...] on the opposite, an immense many-windowed mill [...] .Opposite to the wall, along which the street ran, on one of the narrow sides of the oblong, was a handsome stone-coped house [...] . It was evidently a house which had been built some fifty or sixty years [...] . The stone facings— the long narrow windows, [...] — the flights of steps to the front door, [...] and [...] railing, all witnessed to its age. (*NS* 111)

Mr Thornton was not typical of Manchester manufacturers in that he had not joined the 'bourgeois' exodus from the centre, as the reader is aware from Mr Hale's comment to Margaret when they first arrived in Milton. The mill is in close proximity to the town's main central thoroughfare. Gaskell deliberately chose to locate the Regency house which had been encroached upon by urban and industrial sprawl, cheek-by-jowl with the mill as the spatial manifestation of Thornton's close involvement with, and commitment to, his work-force. Consequently, Thornton inevitably played a deterministic role in the lives of his workers. The Trades Unions and one individual worker, Boucher, determined the strike and the demonstration. Thornton also played a part for having to honour his orders, and to maintain the long-term future of the mill he was forced to employ unskilled Irish immigrants. However, relationship developed based on mutual respect and a regard for the others' point of view. Towards the end of the narrative, Thornton was able to talk and eat with his hands, at their invitation, in the newly established worker dining room. As an employer he was physically accessible to his workers and seen by them to be part of the same place and purpose. Carson, as a millowner, is more typical of his day. The received opinion was that little contact existed between worker and employer and often the latter, like Mr Carson, did not know his workers at all.[191] When Wilson requests the passport for Davenport's admission to hospital, Carson replies peremptorily:

> 'Davenport–Davenport; who is the fellow? I don't know the name?'
> 'He's worked in your factory better nor three year, sir'.
> 'Very likely; I don't pretend to know the names of the men I employ; that I leave to the overlooker' (*MB* 78-9).

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[191] Dennis 79.

Not only is the social gulf between worker and master exemplified and symbolised by the physical distance that separates their respective homes, but the spatial dimension also represents Carson's ignorance about his employees. Carson, cushioned by insurance, worries not about the fate of his workforce when he loses his mill in a fire. In contrast, Thornton knew Higgins sufficiently well to discover the location of his home in order to offer him work. The drama of Carson's mill fire is one of the narrative's pivotal moments for in its aftermath Gaskell is able to demonstrate the dependence of worker upon employer in contrast to the mutual interdependence which characterises *North and South* after the mob demonstration at Thornton's mill, which is the turning point of that novel. Thus spatial reality becomes symbolic representation constantly and consistently throughout the fiction, as the location of home and work-place provides the structure for the narratives and provides the narrative dynamics through character movement.

ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINISM

Throughout the narrative characters move in and out of Manchester. Alice, an exemplar of the process of in-migration was typical of the age, having come from rural Cumberland seeking work.[192] Although it had always been her intention to return to her childhood home, the longest journeys she made were to the peripheral fields, like Greenheys, to collect herbs and to Ancoats, to which she moved permanently in order to support her widowed sister-in-law. In the end it was she who was nursed through her final illness at the Wilson home in Ancoats. Both the journeys she made were no more than a mile.

Ben Davenport, another economic migrant succumbs to the malign influence of Manchester and, like Alice, dies during the course of the narrative, as does George Wilson.[193] Written before Darwin's *Origin of Species*, Gaskell was demonstrating the principle of biological determinism euphemistically known as 'survival of the fittest'

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[192]Kidd writes that: 'rural migrants from Lancashire and Cheshire seeking work were attracted by the higher wages of industrialism'. Kidd 41.

[193] Alice Wilson originates from rural Cumberland, Davenport from Buckinghamshire.

which, if not articulated theoretically, was patently obvious in places like Manchester. In this literary context, those who originate from beyond the town find it difficult, nay impossible to adapt and survive when removed from their natural, rural habitat. However, although Ben Davenport and George Wilson appeared to be the victims of circumstance they possessed innate characteristics that could have given them the freedom to choose. Therefore, Gaskell subtly remains enigmatic about whether or not their respective deaths were the inevitable result of the economic circumstances in Manchester.

The deterministic theme appears again in *North and South,* for Mr and Mrs Hale do not survive their move from Helstone to Milton. Mrs Hale's illness, exacerbated by the unfamiliar and heavily polluted Milton-Northern atmosphere, proved fatal. Of the three, Margaret alone survived the move from the 'south'. By virtue of her own efforts and receptive, open-minded approach to life and the environment, she adapted to her new surroundings and finally found happiness amongst its chimneys. In Mr Thornton she found a kindred spirit, for he was a self-made man who controlled his own destiny without sacrificing his workers in the process. Gaskell demonstrates that Boucher was the victim of his own inadequacies and prejudices against his employers.[194] Neither the Union nor the environment of Manchester were the sole determinants of his suicidal death.

Whilst Gaskell creates characters whose fates seem to be determined almost exclusively by the physical and economic environment of Manchester, because they are unable to adapt, she tempers this view by demonstrating that destiny can be a combination of factors, only one of which is environment. Jane Davenport did not 'give in to despair' so does not succumb to the same fate as her husband. After his death, she seeks and receives financial help from the 'board' and finds a variety of employment whilst 'thinking how she might best cheat the factory inspector, and

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[194] There are parallels with John Barton and Daniel Robson in Boucher's character.

persuade him that 'her big strong hungry Ben was above thirteen' (*MB* 84). With financial help, Jane's determination overcame the degradation of that cellar. None of the characters are fated as Bessy Higgins for she appears to be the sole representative of a character whose demise is wholly determined by the cotton manufacturing industry. When Margaret first made Bessy's acquaintance she was suffering from 'byssinosis', a lung disease which was contracted by those working in the carding rooms of cotton factories.[195] However, Bessy describes the machines that attempt to prevent the fluff from lingering in the air, but she did not work in a factory where the master had invested in such a machine. Although she would have liked to move, her father was the arbiter of her destiny, for he would not allow her to work in a strange place. In addition he spent his money on self-improvement, at the expense of his daughter's health (*NS* 102). Therefore, it is possible to argue that the economy and working class ethos particular to Manchester prevented Bessy from controlling her own destiny, although Bessy's acceptance of her fate must be a factor in the equation.

All in all, Gaskell appears to be somewhat enigmatic about the deterministic role of place in the destiny of her characters. Whilst favouring an element of environmental determinism, Gaskell usually tempers or exacerbates the principle through individual personalities. According to Gallagher, her approach indicates a recognition of the 'new Unitarian emphasis on free will.'[196] This conclusion fits with Gaskell's preoccupation with, and emphasis on, the individual within the socio-economic urban space about which she has chosen to write. Her subtle, somewhat enigmatic treatment of the factors which constitute the equation of human destiny are nowhere better exemplified than in the complex character of John Barton.[197]

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[195] Patricia Ingham, notes, *North and South* (London: Penguin, 1995) 433.

[196] Gallagher in her excellent discussion on 'causality versus conscience' considers that the tension between 'social determinism and 'tragic heroism' is not fully resolved. Her argument centres on the changes in Unitarianism during the 1840's led by James Martineau. It was a movement away from social determinism towards a greater moral freedom. Catherine Gallagher, *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction 1832-1867* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1988) 74.

[197] Uglow suggests that Gaskell is uncertain of her ground in the early chapters but tends to the view that the poor are the instigators of their own fate and refers to their improvidence. Gallagher endorses

A Mancunian born and bred, John Barton appears to be a product of his environment. His stunted physical appearance and his 'wan colourless face' (*MB* 4) suggests Gaskell was a believer in physical determinism.[198] His mother died of 'want of the necessaries of life', and he lost his only son, (before the novel opens) of scarlet fever, because he was unable to provide suitable nourishment when he was 'out of work and living on credit' (*MB* 25). Events and circumstances recounted in the novel conspire to engender feelings of vengeance for the millowners in Barton's breast. Therefore, he becomes the quintessential, 'aggravated' (*MB* 49). rather than 'bewildered' operative,(*MB* 24) active trades Unionist, Chartist, and mouthpiece for the discontented textile workers in Manchester. Gaskell builds up Barton's perspective through his own words, through dramatisation of the point and through narrative commentary. In the opening scene in which he blames Esther's mysterious disappearance on 'good times' in the factories that provided her with the money to indulge her vanity:

> 'That's the worst of factory work for girls. They can earn so much when work is plenty, that they can maintain themselves anyhow. My Mary shall never work in a factory, that I'm determined on. You see Esther spent her money in dress, thinking to set off her pretty face; [...] Says I, 'Esther, I see what you'll end at with your artificials, and your fly-away veils, and stopping out; [...] you'll be a street walker.' (*MB* 6).

Whilst predicting Esther's fate, John Barton, like Nicholas Higgins, had strong views about the factory system for women.[199] At the time of his son Tom's death, 'he stood at one of the shop windows where all edible luxuries are displayed; haunches of venison, Stilton cheeses, moulds of jelly [...] out of this shop came Mrs Hunter!'(*MB* 25). Having seen his former employer's wife emerge laden with edible purchases, the reader is not surprised to learn that John, 'hungry, almost to an animal pitch of

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this point and demonstrates how the novel traces the development of Gaskell's deterministic philosophy. Uglow 200; Gallagher 72-79.

[198]This belief is endorsed by a comment about Barton's wife at the beginning of the novel: 'She had the fresh beauty of the agricultural districts and somewhat of the deficiency of sense in her countenance which is likewise characteristic of the rural inhabitants in comparison with the natives of the manufacturing towns' (*MB* 4).

[199] Esther's fate has already been discussed.

ravenous [...] returned home, with a bitter spirit of wrath in his heart' (*MB* 25). Gaskell reinforces the picture by a narrative comment directed at the reader which follows: 'You can fancy now, the hoards of vengeance in his heart against the employers' (*MB* 25).

The scene of utter degradation and squalor in Davenport's cellar instigates a diatribe from Barton on this subject of the gulf between employers and workers:

> 'You'll say, [...] they'n getten capital an' we'n getten none. I say, our labour's our capital, and we ought to draw interest on that. They get interest on their capital somehow a' this time while ourn is lying idle, else how could they all live as they do? Besides, there's many on 'em as nought to begin wi'; there's Carsons, and Duncombes, and Mengies, and many another, as comed into Manchester with clothes to their back, and that were all, and now they're worth their tens of thousands, a' getten out of our labour [...] . They'n screwed us down to th' lowest peg, in order to make their great big fortunes, and build their great big houses, and we, why we're just clemming, many and many of us (*MB* 73-74).

His sense of injustice drove him, but not the narrative, to London to present the People's Charter where he re-iterated his views: 'And why are we to be molested [...] going decently about our business which is life and death to us and many a little one clemming at home in Lancashire' (*MB* 116).

The climax is reached with events surrounding the Chartists' strike. Gaskell would have been aware of the disturbances in the town in 1842; certainly there are records in the Winkworth's correspondence of the strike and mobs who marched along Ashton Road 'only hundreds of yards from their home.'[200] After Harry Carson's proposed resolutions to the Trades Union delegates, a meeting with the members takes place at which Barton speaks. He espouses his cause with rhetorical vigour to gain the support of those listening to him.

> It makes me more than sad, it makes my heart burn within me, to see that folk can make a jest of striving men; of chaps who comed to ask for a bit o' fire for th' old granny, as shivers i' th' cold; for a bit o' bedding, and some warm clothing to the poor wife who lies in labour on th' damp flags; and for victuals

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200 Winkworth, *Letters and Memorials* vol. 1 62. Susanna Winkworth records how they distributed food from their windows to the striking men who roamed the suburbs.

> for the childer, whose little voices are getting too faint and weak to cry aloud wi' hunger. (*MB* 220)

His speech gathers momentum and reaches a crescendo with this emotional appeal,

> For brothers, is not them the things we ask for when we ask for more wage? We donnot want dainties, we want bellyfuls; we donnot want gimcrack coats and waistcoats, we want warm clothes, [...] We donnot want their grand houses, we want a roof to cover us from the rain, and the snow, and the storm. (*MB* 220)

Barton then almost whispers his next comment to maximise the dramatic effect of his message: 'I've seen a father who had killed his child rather than let it clem before his eyes; and he were a tender hearted man [...] '(*MB* 220).

The experience of his own life, events like the presentation of the People's Charter, the Chartists' strike and what he had observed in Manchester, produced the conviction that the economic system was unjust. If this were the full extent of Gaskell's portrait of John Barton it would be possible to say that he was a victim of circumstance and Manchester's economic conditions were demonstrably deterministic. However, such a view would be only a partial interpretation of the narrative. From the beginning, Gaskell points out that within her protagonist there existed 'an extreme earnestness; resolute for good or evil; a sort of latent, stern enthusiasm' (*MB* 4). With the death of Mary, his wife, 'the good' in 'the countenance' ceased to predominate, 'one of the good influences [...] had departed' and 'his gloom and sternness became habitual instead of occasional' (*MB* 22).

If the reader accepts Barton's view that his wife's death was caused by anxiety about Esther and that Esther's fate was determined by her employment in a textile mill during good times, then it follows that there was a causal link between these events and John's descent into gloom, despair and eventual death.[201] Therefore, a case can be argued for the determinism of the Manchester environment. However, that view fails to take sufficient account of the intrinsic qualities of Barton's character. These traits

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[201]There is the greater likelihood that medical complications in connection with the birth were the cause of Mary Barton senior's death.

contributed to his vociferous speechifying and vengeful attitude, which were not inevitable. Wilson who lost baby twins, his job and his self-respect, always gently countered Barton's arguments as he tried to see the virtues in every man, employers included: 'There's many and many a master as good or better nor us' (*MB* 73). The strength of Barton's feelings led him to participate in the actual lottery to take the ultimate revenge on the 'masters'. He drew the marked paper and committed the crime. With the lottery amongst the union men, Gaskell dramatises her view of the 'lottery-like' nature of the lives of the workers whose fortunes were beyond their control (*MB* xxxv). At that moment, he was at the mercy of what D'Albertis would describe as 'the anarchic influence of chance destiny'. It is possible to suggest, therefore, that the resolution of Barton's destiny was the sum of the environmental determinism of Manchester, his own personality and chance. Wright acknowledges this view. He writes: 'It is an essential part of Gaskell's purpose that his (Harry Carson's) murder is part of the complex human tragedy created by the conditions she describes; it is not merely a symbolic assassination to illustrate labour conflict.'[202] Gaskell does not leave it there though. She develops Barton's character further. From Mary's death, the 'bad' might have dominated (*MB* 4), his reaction to the 'seeming injustice' vociferous and vengeful; but all he did was for unselfish motives. There are numerous examples throughout the novel which exemplify both his sympathy for the poor and destitute and his belief that 'it is the poor and the poor only as does such things for the poor' (*MB* 8). From his cupboard he takes the food intended for his supper to help feed the Davenport family. Before he departs, ostensibly for Glasgow, but actually to commit the murder, he takes the lost little boy home to his mother 'with beautiful patience' (*MB* 233). At the same time, Barton was ignorant because of the lack of communication between master and men.[203] Consequently he, like most

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[202] Wright, ed. *Mary Barton* xiv. This issue is the crux of Gallagher's argument. Gallagher 74.

[203]The reason for the strike in Milton was in part because the workers were kept in ignorance about the economic circumstances. Margaret expressed her view that they had a 'human right to know' about what was to affect them directly. The narrative perspective of *North and South* is undoubtedly more even-handed and the 'master' far more inclined to listen to the worker's viewpoint.

other workers, failed to appreciate that the millowners were unable to control demand for the cotton cloth. Job Legh, in defence of Barton's point of view at the end of the novel, provokes this response from Mr Carson: 'Now how in the world can we help it? We cannot regulate the demand for labour [...] . When there is no market for our goods, we suffer just as much as you can do' (*MB* 453).

Carson, in attempting to counter Job's argument, falls into the trap of espousing his own self-interest. During the Chartists' strike, Gaskell makes it clear to the reader that the actions of the masters in concealing the truth from the workers was a crucial factor in provoking the discontent of the workers. Despite her denial, her knowledge of Political Economy was put to good use as she attempted to provide reasons why Barton acted as he did. Gaskell created in Barton a credible human being with thoughts and feelings. Although his environment determined the circumstances of his life, his response to that environment was a function of his character.[204] Gaskell states that his fate was determined by his 'overpowering thought, [...] 'rich and poor; why are they so separate, so distinct when God has made them all?' (*MB* 198-90) whilst allowing him the freedom to choose how he attempted to find a solution to that fundamental question.

The freedom to choose was far more available to those not employed within the textile industry in Manchester. Mary was mistress of her own fate as she tried to follow her instincts in her romantic liaisons. Despite Sally Leadbitter's manipulation it was Mary who instigated and carried the action necessary to provide Jem's alibi at his trial. Jem too, was not a victim of the economy to the same extent as the weavers and spinners, for the engineering industry in which he was employed was not subject to the economic recession. On the other hand, Gaskell makes it clear that wherever those two lives touched the lives of those involved with cotton manufacturing, their freedom was curtailed. Mary's liaison with Harry Carson was socially unacceptable and had to be concealed from her father who would not let her undertake factory work

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[204] Barton can be compared with Daniel Robson, whose death was in part caused by his determination to wreak revenge upon the press gangs.

because of the possible consequences exemplified by Esther. Jem was brought to trial because his gun was found upon John Barton. Finally, neither Mary nor Jem were masters of their own destiny. Although acquitted, it was made clear that Jem was not an acceptable work-mate. 'I don't think I could have well stayed on. A good number of the men managed to let out they should not like to work under me again' (*MB* 425). Jem's master, Duncombe, demonstrated those qualities that Wilson had noted before he died, that some masters were 'good'. Duncombe did not believe in Jem's guilt and considered his men 'wrong headed' (*MB* 443). However, despite his support, both Jem's unacceptability and the fact that Mary was the daughter of the culprit made their position untenable. For all their apparent freedom, their destiny was determined finally by the environment of Manchester which they abandoned in favour of a new life in Canada. [205]

All those who did not originate in Manchester or whose lives were directly affected by textile manufacturing were dead by the end of *Mary Barton,* and those who survived departed leaving the town with an abandoned and empty space at its heart. Gaskell underpins both these industrial novels with her belief that place and human beings were inextricably linked. However it is clear from the evidence presented in the fiction that she considered that destiny was the result of both environment and character.

CONCLUSION

Moretti's model has proved a useful springboard for discussion in this chapter to demonstrate that place is both the central organising and unifying principle of both industrial novels. However whilst the narrative of *Mary Barton* is confined to the northern industrial landscape, the narrative structure of *North and South* depends upon diverse locations but more particularly on the north-south polarity. Nevertheless,

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[205] Edgar Wright suggests that emigration was a 'cop-out'. However, the end may have been part of her careful design. It may be intended to balance the opening scene that is also beyond the built environment. It may also be intended to demonstrate that Jem's skills acquired during the industrial boom in Manchester were transferable and in demand. To some extent industrial Manchester gave him the freedom to make a choice about his fate.

as the principal focus of this discussion has centred upon Milton-Northern so the conclusion concentrates upon parallels between the novels.

It has been shown that the interconnecting, overlapping domestic spheres linked by a skein of streets provide more than just the means of presenting Manchester, Liverpool and Milton-Northern. Gaskell selects, amalgamates and manipulates the familiar urban topography of Manchester to use as the central organising principle of both narratives. Whether geographically precise or topographically vague, real or fictionalised, the location of the homes and the configuration of the streets have provided the narrative structure and engendered narrative drive.

However, as Chapple points out, 'a sense of place is an actual location perceived through the senses',[206] and in both novels, the characters perceive the townscapes through filters of relative familiarity, which may, in part, account for the contrasting narrative perspectives within and between these novels. It is clear that Gaskell attempted to educate her reading public through two contrasting narrative perspectives. *Mary Barton* is more didactic and polemical in its approach whereas *North and South* adopts a more conciliatory tone and a demonstrative, impressionistic method to convey its message. As a result, Milton-Northern was a fictional creation inspired by Manchester but deliberately kept topographically vague in order to redress the balance with the spatially specific picture of working class Manchester in *Mary Barton.* It has also been shown that the novels' resolutions have a spatial manifestation appropriate to their narrative perspectives. The continuing habitation of Milton demonstrates the mutual understanding and equilibrium of compromise and interdependence of worker and master that developed out of that system. In *Mary Barton*, there is no chance of survival or immediate reconciliation, so Manchester is left empty due to death or emigration.

Underpinning both narratives is a belief in the inextricable links between human beings and their environment. However, in her subtle, somewhat enigmatic

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206 J.A.V. Chapple, 'A Sense of Place: Elizabeth Gaskell and the Brontës,' *Brontë Society Transactions* 20 (1992): 314.

consideration of human destiny, Gaskell cannot be accused of of 'crude determinism'[207], because she demonstrates that the effects of the socio-economic system of these urban-industrial spaces is exacerbated or tempered by what Gallagher would term the 'free will'[208] of the characters.

Both narratives, however, were written from 'deep within the experience of the town'[209] and without the physical and socio-economic geography of Manchester these novels could not have been imagined nor constructed.

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[207] Easson, 'The Novel of Local Pride' 701

[208] Gallagher 74.

[209] Preston 35.

CHAPTER 3

'WILDSCAPES' – *RUTH*

INTRODUCTION TO THE CONCEPT OF 'WILDSCAPE'

This chapter and the two that follow comprise the middle phase of Gaskell's writing. Sandwiched between the moral compulsion to write about the industrial townscape of Manchester and her desire to fulfil her inner need to write about familiar and much loved rural and provincial environments, this phase represents a move from built to natural environment. Although *Ruth, The Life of Charlotte Brontë* and *Sylvia's Lovers* will be considered separately, they are linked by the concept of 'wildscape.' This term is coined from the texts in which the word 'wild' appears frequently. It is used to describe large, wide, unenclosed, featureless moor and sea topographies which possess 'illimitable horizons.' It will be argued that the essence of the wildscape lies in their treeleesness. To someone whose informative years were spent principally in the 'enclosed intimacy' of the well-wooded gently undulating landscape of East Cheshire, the vast tracts of featureless, seemingly unending land and sea which appear in *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* and *Sylvia's Lovers* were totally unfamiliar and alien. Depicting such environments was a departure for Gaskell as they necessitated research, in the form of planned visits to Yorkshire and from documentary sources. *Ruth,* however, grew out of the author's lived experience and all the locations which inspired the novel were familiar. However, the theme of the 'fallen woman' is enacted within the natural wildscape of North Wales and a seascape inspired by the coastline around Silverdale with which Ruth herself was not familiar. As these wildscapes are not unified by either geographical area or perceptual filter, attention will be given to their portrayal to ascertain whether differences exist within the portrayal of this landscape category.

When in the throes of 'wild', uncontrolled, and passionate emotional responses to events, Gaskell's fictional characters are depicted within these 'wildscapes', thus

forging links between landscape and character.[1] In this and the following chapters it will be argued that these land and seascapes are both realistically and symbolically integral to the narratives.

INTRODUCTION TO *RUTH*

Unlike her first and last novels, which were confined to a single landscape, *Ruth* moves through a variety of vividly realised and highly symbolic townscapes, domestic interiors and 'wild' expansive landscapes and shorescapes. She was not restricted to a particular environmental, socio-economic or political context by the story of a 'fallen woman'. As Craik observes, 'in *Ruth*, Elizabeth Gaskell had to choose her story, her plot and her setting. They are not decided for her, as *Mary Barton's* were, by the very subject she chose.'[2] Given this freedom of choice, it becomes apparent from careful study that Gaskell drew her information and inspiration from the familiar, beloved landscapes of childhood and adulthood. It is the rural landscape of Cheshire, the often visited North Lancashire coast and mountains of North Wales which appear fictionalised in *Ruth.*

Easson has suggested that in comparison with her 'exact, precise organisation of domestic space' Gaskell's topography is often 'vague and imprecise'.[3] This chapter will consider the ways in which familiar landscapes informed and inspired her second novel, allowing her to create identifiable, 'precisely delineated, topographically secure'[4] and accurate, if fictional, landscapes and townscapes. The discussion will focus upon these individual townscapes and landscapes to demonstrate that they form the foundations of the novel's structure, drive its narrative, control its pace and express its themes.

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[1] *The Life* 55; *Sylvia's Lovers* 370; 389

[2] W.A. Craik, *Elizabeth Gaskell and the English Provincial Novel* (London: Methuen, 1975) 51.

[3] Angus Easson, 'Noah's Ark and Birds' Nests: Domestic Space in *Ruth,*' The Victorians at Leisure, Gaskell Society Conference, Chester College, 9 Aug. 1997. Unpublished paper 1-34.

[4] James Reed, *Sir Walter Scott: Landscape and Locality* (London: Athlone, 1980) 6. Andrew Sanders first introduced the term 'topographically secure' to me, 16 Sept. 1998.

It will be argued that rather than offering an alternative to deterministic realism, the 'romantic' overtones are interwoven into the realistic landscape so that they reinforce and exemplify Gaskell's belief in the intimate connection between human beings and their environment-a philosophy which is expressed at the beginning of *Ruth:*[5]

> The traditions of those bygone times, even to the smallest social particular, enable one to understand more clearly the circumstances which contributed to the formation of character. The daily life into which people are born, and into which they are absorbed before they are well aware, form chains which only one in a hundred has moral strength enough to despise. (*Ruth* 2)

The fact that this deeply held belief underpins the narrative throughout the novel will be discussed in relation to each of the environments Gaskell selected for her story of Ruth.

'REAL AND IMAGINED WORLDS' – A GEOGRAPHY OF *RUTH*

Establishing locations.

Gaskell herself considered *Ruth* a subject, 'unfit for fiction' (*Letters* 227)[6] and in anticipation of censure and opposition, she judiciously created the fictional names of Fordham and Eccleston for the towns in which Ruth resides; Abermouth, for the seaside resort which cannot be found on mid-nineteenth-century maps of the coastline of England and Wales; and an initial anonymity for 'the little mountain village' (*Ruth* 62) in North Wales. She subsequently slips in the fictitious name of Llan-Dhu for this settlement. Such superficial disguise is supported by the rather vague geographical locations for Fordham and Eccleston. The former is 'an assize town in the eastern counties' whilst Eccleston lies on 'a plain' surrounded by 'waving uplands.' At first sight, these descriptions seems to reveal little about where Gaskell imagined Fordham and Eccleston to be. Although some distances are mentioned, Gaskell assumed that the combination of vague locations and real and fictitious names provided a satisfactory smokescreen for her readers.

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[5] Angus Easson, introduction, *Ruth,* by Elizabeth Gaskell (London: Penguin, 1997) xiii.
[6] Angus Easson, *Elizabeth Gaskell* (London: RKP, 1979) 109.

'The eastern counties'

Commentators and critics, notably Shelston and Easson[7] in the most recent paperback publications of the novel, have made attempts to identify places inspired Gaskell when she wrote *Ruth.* Both have done much to enlighten present day readers about the possible identity of Fordham. However, they are led, as her contemporary readers would have been, by Gaskell's reference to the location 'in the eastern counties' (Ruth 1). They have looked to East Anglian towns as possible models. Shelston claims Chelmsford as the obvious choice because of Gaskell's frequent visits made to the Shaens at Crix in Essex.[8] However, although Chelmsford's aesthetic Georgian architecture and function as an assize town is similar to Fordham, there is no documentary evidence to support Gaskell's familiarity with the town.[9] Easson inclines towards Norwich, as his argument centres upon the Tudor development of this town.[10] Again there is no documentary evidence to support familiarity with this Norfolk town. Gaskell travelled extensively across the length and breadth of Britain but certainly the northern part of East Anglia seems to be one of the few areas which is a virtual blank on her map of the country.[11] Throughout her writing career, she either used places with which she was familiar, or she deliberately visited unfamiliar places she intended to use for her literary purposes, as she did in the cases of Haworth and Whitby. Therefore it seems far more likely that Fordham is informed and inspired by Knutsford in which she had grown up, knew and loved. (See Fig 3.1)

A good case can be made for this suggestion based on the information presented by Gaskell.

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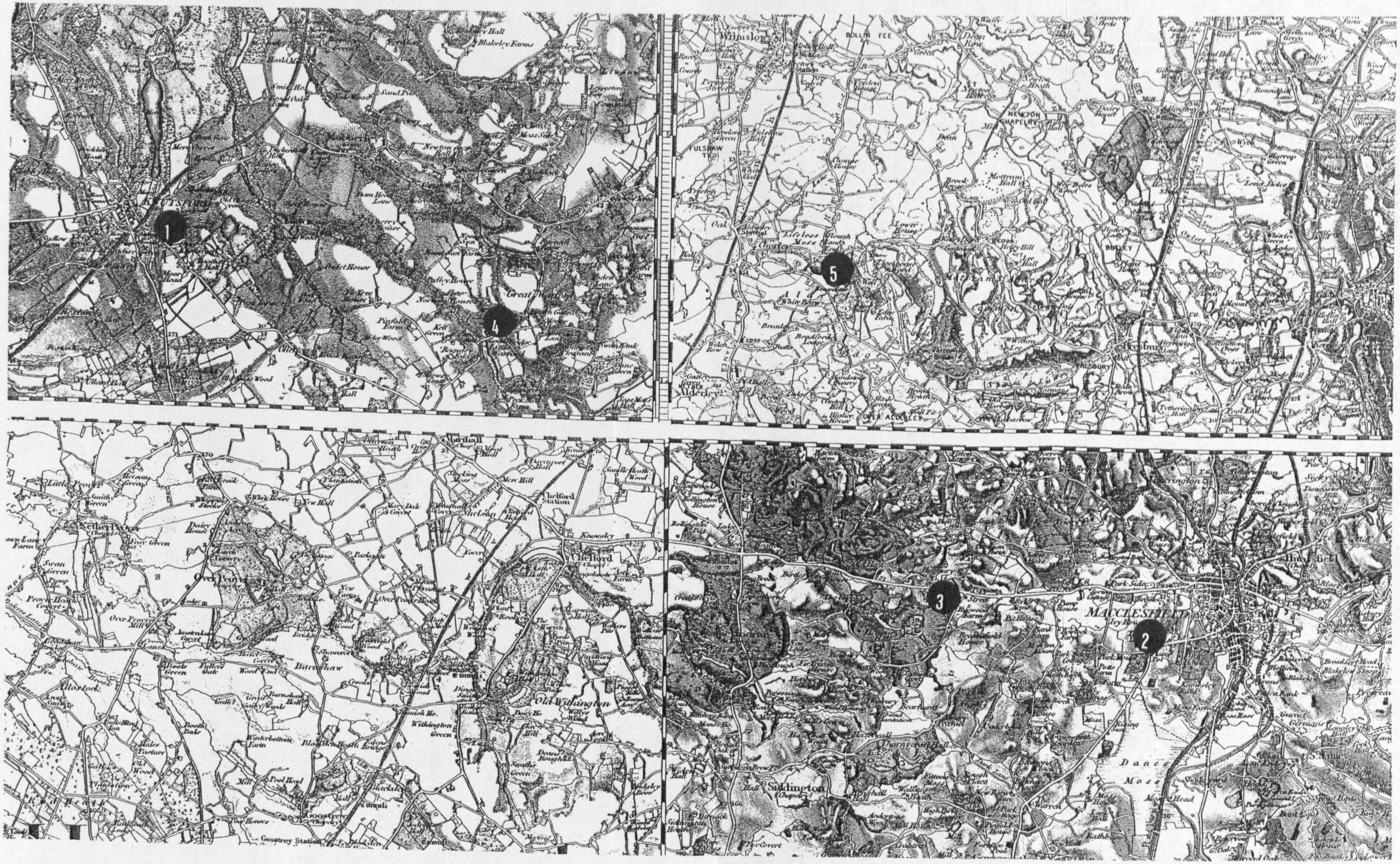
[7] Shelston, notes, *Ruth* 459, 463. Angus Easson, notes, *Ruth* 376; 387.

[8] 'The Shaens were a Unitarian wealthy family from Essex'. Gaskell enjoyed close friendship with the family and first went to stay with them in 1847. 'William Shaen later married Emily Winkworth.' Jenny Uglow, *Elizabeth Gaskell A Habit of Stories* (London: Faber, 1993) 166.

[9] H.Grieve, *The Sleeper and the Shadows; Chelmsford: Its People and its Past,* vol. 2 (Chelmsford: Essex Record Office, 1994).

[10] Easson, notes, *Ruth,* 376.

[11] Cromer, a sea-side resort in Norfolk, appears momentarily in the latter part of *North and South.* Margaret and the Lennoxes went there for an autumn break. Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1982) 414.



1. ***Fordham*** - inspired by Knutsford
   A small market town

2. ***Eccleston*** - inspired by Macclesfield
   Lies in the Pennine foothills

3. ***Henbury*** - a tiny settlement on the turnpike road between Macclesfield and Knutsford.
   This is the place from which Mrs Mason was travelling when she encountered Ruth and Bellingham

4. ***Milham Grange*** - *Ruth's home*- inspired by Sandlebridge Farm, Gaskell's grandparent's home.

5. ***'The Hill of the Hundred'***- unenclosed common
   the location of Ruth's seduction inspired by Alderley Edge

Real place names *Fictional names*

Fig 3.1 The Provincial Countryside of *Ruth*

Source: *Northwich and Warrington*, Sheet 26, *Buxton and Stockport*
Sheet 27, maps One inch to one mile, Reprint of 1st Edition Ordnance Survey (Newton Abott: David and Charles)

For instance, the names Fordham and Milham describe the site of these settlements. The first means the crossing place of the river and it is thought that the original site of Knutsford was located at the shallow place where King Canute crossed the Lily Brook.[12] Milham literally means 'the place of the mill' and can be identified as Colthurst mill by Pedley Brook in the valley near Sandlebridge Farm.[13] She describes Ruth's home as a 'Grange' which is defined as 'an establishment where farming is carried on' or 'a farmhouse with outbuildings'.[14] This is an appropriate but disguised name for Sandlebridge which was known as a 'farm'.

As their relationship begins, Ruth and Bellingham 'sauntered through the fragrant lanes [...] not yet fully shaded by overarching elms' (*Ruth* 45) to reach Milham Grange. The flowery hedgerows and umbrageous deciduous trees are quintessentially Gaskellian and these two elements typify the rural landscapes of *Wives and Daughters* and *Cousin Phillis* which are generally acknowledged to be based upon her experience of Cheshire:[15]

> It was past five o' clock before they came to the great mill-wheel which stood, [...] motionless in a brown mass of shade, [...] . They clambered the little hill, [...] looked on Milham Grange, now lying still and peaceful in its afternoon shadows.(*Ruth* 45)

This description is reminiscent of Sandlebridge. In the valley, not many yards from the Farm, is the mill. There is an incline up to the farm and even today trees overarch the narrow road. The sense of place here is sufficient to confirm that familiar scenes of childhood inspired this part of the novel's topography.

Textual evidence which connects Fordham and its surroundings indisputably with the Cheshire countryside is depicted in the final part of the Sunday afternoon walk to her childhood home. Although no route is followed, the couple's leisurely return to

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[12] Charles Bennett, *The Story of Knutsford* (Knutsford: The Knutsford Society, 1976) 6.

[13] *Cheshire,* map Sheet No: LXXX *One inch to one mile,* 1st ed, (Ordnance Map Office, 1864). Mrs Ellis H.Chadwick, *Mrs Gaskell Haunts Homes and Stories* (London: Pitman, 1913) 174.

[14] *Oxford Shorter Dictionary* 3rd ed. vol. II (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1968) 821 and *Collins English Dictionary* 2nd ed. (London: Collins, 1986) 663.

[15] Winifred Gérin, E*lizabeth Gaskell* (Oxford: Oxford UP, I976) 234 and Uglow 541-542

Fordham involves leaving the intimate, enclosed, leafy lanes of Milham to climb 'the hill of the hundred' (*Ruth* 51).[16] On the summit, 'they stood together' (*Ruth* 51) to watch the sunset and admire the view. Although deliberately non-specific about which hill she had in mind, readers familiar with the area would have recognised it as 'The Beacon' , the highest point on Alderley Edge. It stands out on early maps as the highest point in the area and in the eighteenth century would have been seen from miles around.[17] In the 1850's, despite its wooded nature, Alderley Edge was a significant topographical feature and had become a well known beauty spot because of its magnificent views over the Cheshire Plain. Thanks to the railway, the area had become accessible to Mancunians as early as 1842, when the process of building began, but it was always to remain exclusive.[18] Wealthy merchants purchased plots on the incline up towards the Edge on which to build grand houses. Henry Winkworth was one of these and the family moved into their new home of 'Thornfield' in 1850.[19] Although there is no documented evidence of a visit before 1856, as good friends of the Winkworths, Gaskell intended to go to Alderley and it seems likely that she would have visited the family in their new home during their early years there.[20] However, her familiarity with the 'Edge' may be derived from experiences before her marriage and life in Manchester. Only two and half miles from Sandlebridge and three miles from Knutsford, its accessibility and its scenic beauty contrasts with the lower, more intimate environment around Knutsford, and Sandlebridge, and would have made it

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16 Although Alderley Edge is a significant topographical feature dominating an otherwise gently undulating landscape but is, in fact, not the only hill in the Macclesfield Hundred. The ridge of the Pennine foothills, which averages a height of 1050', lies to the east along which are peaks like 'The Cloud' at Bosley (1132') and Shutlingslow (1670').

17 Speed's Map 1610. Roy Westall, *Wilmslow and Alderley Edge* (Chichester: Phillimore, 1994) frontispiece. The quotation appears in the section entitled 'The Beacon'.

18 Alan Crosby, *A History of Cheshire* (Chichester: Phillimore, 1996) 120. Howard Hodson, *A Portrait of Wilmslow* (Wilmslow: Hampsfell, 1974) 69-70.

19 Catherine writes to Emily Shaen telling her, that during a family discussion, about which novel they would like to have written, her mother chose *Jane Eyre*. That choice may account for the name of the house. Susanna Winkworth, ed. *Letters and Memorials of Catherine Winkworth* vol. I (Clifton: E.Austin, 1883) 411.

20 Catherine's letter to Emily on Dec. 26th 1855 makes it clear that Mrs Gaskell is to visit them and in fact she went during the second week of January 1856. Winkworth, *Letters and Memorials* vol. I 541. *Letters,* 381. It was her intention to go to Alderley as early as 1851.*Letters* 173.

excursion venue during her childhood and teenage years. She makes reference to a romantic piece of local folk-lore associated with Alderley Edge in a letter to Mary Howitt in 1838:

> And if you were on Alderley Edge, the hill between Cheshire and Derbyshire, could not I point out to you the very entrance to the cave where King Arthur and his knights lie sleeping in their golden armour till the day when England's peril shall summon them to her rescue. (*Letters* 32)

Gaskell's familiarity with the site is evident from the topographical description in this letter and her detailed description of the physical environment which surrounded Ruth and Bellingham when they reached 'the tableland' (*Ruth* 53). The use of this noun is apposite as Alderley Edge is an undulating ridge rather than a peak. The geology, of this 'unenclosed' (*Ruth* 52) space at the summit of the hill provides another clue to the location because it produces a distinctive topographical and ecological landscape:

> At the summit there was a level space, sixty or seventy yards square, of unenclosed and broken ground, over which the golden bloom of the gorse cast a rich hue, while its delicious scent perfumed the fresh and nimble air. On one side of this common, the ground sloped down to a clear bright pond, in which were mirrored the rough sand-cliffs that rose abrupt on the opposite bank; [...] . On the far side of the green waste, close by the road, and well placed for the requirements of horses or their riders who might be weary with the ascent of the hill, there was a public-house, which was more of a farm than an inn. (*Ruth* 51-52)

Alderley Edge is a north-west facing fault escarpment of resistant sandstone 570' above sea level. It outcrops naturally to produce an undulating ridge with 90° slopes on the upthrown side. The sandstone was extensively mined for its copper during the eighteenth century, so the cliffs accurately described by Gaskell may well represent the vertical edge of a disused quarry and the pond, its infilled workings.[21] Sandstone, an acid rock, produces an acid sandy soil which supports heathland vegetation

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[21] Roy Westall discusses the copper workings on the Edge in the *Wizard's Well* section of his book and Photograph 169 accords well with Gaskell's description of the 'sandy cliffs' and water at the base of the rock. These workings can be clearly seen today at the old Engine Vein workings near the Wizard Inn which could have been the model for 'the comfortable, quiet, unfrequented inn' (*Ruth,* 52). The 'Wizard' is reputedly Merlin, of the Arthurian legends which fits closely with the romantic story that Gaskell recounted to Mary Howitt. *Letters* 32.

typified by species such as gorse. The presence of Scots pine is also accurate for Lord Stanley, on whose estate Alderley Edge is located, afforested the area between 1745 and 1755 with introduced conifers such as Scots Pine, [22] which by 1850 would have been well established. The 1879 large scale plan of the 'Edge' reveals an area of 'unenclosed land' within an otherwise wooded and enclosed landscape.[23] Therefore, in terms of individual topographical features, Gaskell produces a faithful representation of reality. However, it should be noted that, in this instance, she could have been employing here a technique which is obvious in other landscapes in *Ruth,* that of 'amalgamation'. That is to say that she has more than one landscape in mind whilst she is writing. In this case, the depicted landscape could be a combination of the sandy heath of Alderley Edge and that of Knutsford Heath. Similar in geology, topography and vegetation , they both have unenclosed areas of 'broken, sandy, gorse covered ground'(*Ruth* 52). As a child she 'learnt her lessons and ate her lunch at sandpits on the Heath', according to Chapple who comments further: 'Gaskell must have created for them (her daughters) the image of a solitary child wandering through the dwarf yellow gorse and purple heather that could be found just across the road'.[24] The theory that Gaskell drew on her familiarity with Alderley Edge can also be supported from the novel by a clue which may or may not have been intentional. Gaskell drops into the text the real local name of 'Henbury' which fits into the geography of the area. On that Sunday evening Mrs Mason, whilst returning from her customary visit to her father, was diverted by her brother. In order 'to give her the unpleasant information of the misbehaviour of her eldest son,' he 'had undertaken to drive her round by Henbury' (*Ruth* 54). In the mid-nineteenth century, Henbury was a small village to the west of Macclesfield on the main turnpike road to Knutsford. Gaskell imagined Mrs Mason would have been travelling along that road to return to

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[22] *Alderley Edge and its neighbourhood* (1843, Didsbury, Manchester: E.J. Morten, 1969) 6. There is an excellent contemporary description of the physical environment of the area in this volume, 6-7.
[23] *Cheshire,* map Sheet XXVIII.14 Twenty five inches to one mile (Southampton: Ordnance Map Office, 1879).
[24] John Chapple, *Elizabeth Gaskell, The Early Years* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1997) 163-4.

her workshop-home in Fordham. Alderley Edge is not located on that road but lies to the north so the route would have been a long diversion and makes geographical nonsense. Equally, if Gaskell had Sandlebridge in mind for Milham Grange, then Bellingham and Ruth would not encounter Alderley Edge on their route home unless they were taking a long diversion. (See Fig. 3.1) Therefore, although the locations appear to be firmly entrenched in the Cheshire landscape their spatial relationships are not geographically accurate when tested against reality. It may be assumed then that their role is largely symbolic.

Neither is Gaskell is explicit about the orientation of the inn. It is not possible to tell from the 'square figure of the landlord standing at the open house-door' whether 'the landscape beyond' (*Ruth* 60) is a view across the Cheshire Plain or whether he is facing away from the Edge towards the road. Although vague geography does not detract from Gaskell's literary purposes, for it becomes apparent only when the geography is checked against reality, her approach is in marked contrast to a writer like Eliot who would have verified distances and directions before committing pen to paper.[25] In this case it seems, the accuracy of the geography was secondary. She was drawing on her memories of Alderley Edge to re-create rather than replicate a place which would be realistic enough to play a role in Ruth's story. Also, of course, she needed to maintain some element of disguise because this was the scene of Ruth's seduction.

After Bellingham left to collect the carriage, Ruth began to have second thoughts about going away with him which were derived from a strongly-evoked sense of place:

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[25]This was suggested by Andrew Sanders during discussion of the novel, 23 March 1998 and subsequently and independently endorsed by Alan Shelston at the Spring Meeting of the Gaskell Society in Manchester, 25 April 1998.

> Ruth became hot [...] and opened the window, [...] . The bush of sweet-briar, underneath the window, scented the place, and the delicious fragrance reminded her of her old home. I think scents affect and quicken the memory more than either sights or sounds. (*Ruth* 60) [26]

However, intimidated because of her youth, insecurity and lack of experience of life, Ruth felt she could not approach the inn-keeper who barred her exit. Confined within the interior space, she is unable to control her own destiny. Alderley Edge with its magnificent views and unenclosed, gorse covered, sandy, broken ground was an ideal physical location for the moment of dramatic tension in which Ruth had the opportunity to control her own destiny. The views and unenclosed nature of the land represent the possibilities for Ruth, whereas the walk across the difficult terrain represents the obstacles in front of her as she approaches a turning point in her life.

> Hand-in-hand, now pricked by the far-spreading gorse, now ankle-deep in sand; now pressing the soft, thick heath, which should make so brave an autumn show; and now over wild thyme and other fragrant herbs, they made their way. (*Ruth* 52-53)

Gaskell uses the varied physical landscape through which Ruth and Bellingham walk symbolically to mark a progression in Ruth's life from the familiar, secure, childhood intimacy of the fragrant lanes around Milham to rough, unfamiliar, unenclosed hilltop territory where she is at the mercy of other people's decisions about her destiny; decisions which bring abandonment and unhappiness. Encompassed within the wide views and flower-decked, wooded natural beauty of Gaskell's beloved Cheshire countryside are rough, thorny patches of unenclosed, and therefore, wild ground which have to be trodden and which can offer no protection against 'agony' (*Ruth* 83). (There are symbolic parallels here with the later scenes in Wales in which Ruth moves from the 'enclosed' mountain encircled village to the open expanses of moorland beyond after Bellingham has deserted her.) The latter part of the walk across a 'fragrant carpet of herbs' represent happier times and sweeter experiences which Ruth is to encounter when she reaches and settles in Eccleston. The pace throughout this afternoon walk remains leisurely, belying the dramatic tension which

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[26] This authorial intervention is reminiscent of Sandlebridge. *Letters* 5-6. See Chapter 2 28.

reaches its climax as Mrs Mason arrives unseen, unexpectedly and coincidentally at the same place. She disappears in a 'flash' hardly causing a ripple in the speed of the tale. It is only as Bellingham's carriage 'dashes up to the door' that a sense of urgency is conveyed as he seeks to hurry her into the vehicle so they can leave (*Ruth* 61). Again it is not Ruth but Bellingham who determines her destiny at this point, for 'She was little accustomed to oppose the wishes of anyone -obedient and docile by nature and unsuspicious and innocent of any harmful consequences' (*Ruth* 61).

Their destination appeared to be the metropolis, which, although a real place, remains invisible in the narrative. The reader next encounters the couple in North Wales. This geographical hole in the narrative will be discussed later in the chapter.

North Wales

Although Gaskell locates 'the little mountain village' (*Ruth* 62) in a real region where other real places are mentioned, it possesses the fictional name of Llan-dhu . In contrast to the names Fordham and Milham, which are euphemisms for their respective sites, this euphemistic place name also carries emotional overtones as it conveys an atmosphere giving the name an additional layer of meaning and 'romantic' overtones. The literal meaning of 'Llan-dhu is 'black church.'[27] However, a slightly looser, alternative interpretation is 'dark place'. Commentators agree that Gaskell had Ffestiniog in mind, a village with which she was familiar from visits both before and after her marriage.[28] Its probable location can be defined by real place names and distances given in the text as it is 'twenty miles across the bleakest mountain road to

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[27] C.F.Cliffe, *The Book of North Wales* 2nd ed. (London, 1851) 5-6. It should be noted that Gaskell's spelling of black is incorrect and should read 'ddu'. This is another example perhaps of her failure to check details. The mountain peak, Moelwyn, is also incorrect. Gaskell has 'Moel Wynn' (*Ruth* 66).

[28] Sharps quotes Ward's use of the engraving by David Cox of the Vale of Ffestiniog to illustrate the Knutsford edition of Ruth. J.G. Sharps, *Mrs Gaskell: Observation and Invention* (Fontwell, Sussex: Linden Press, 1970) 158. Mrs Ellis H.Chadwick, *Mrs Gaskell:.Haunts, Homes and Stories* (London: Pitman, 1913) 150.

Pen trê Voelas' (*Ruth* 62), along 'the Yspytty road' (*Ruth* 92) which would make Ffestiniog the geographically secure inspiration for Lland-dhu.[29] (See fig. 3.2). However, her association with, and memories of, Ffestiniog and North Wales were not always happy ones. The sense of Llan-dhu as dark and black -the colour of mourning- is linked with her ten month-old baby Willie who contracted scarlet fever in Porthmadog in 1845 whilst the family were there on holiday. He died there. Llan-dhu becomes a place of high emotional drama as the relationship between Ruth and Bellingham, breaks down leaving her forsaken, suicidal and at a crossroads in her life. For Ruth, as for Gaskell, the initial delight in the beauty and grandeur of Llan-dhu's scenery turned to misery, dark despair, grief and the realisation that the mountains were 'no barrier against agony.'[30] It was an appropriate place and appropriate fictitious place-name for Gaskell to use in this novel. In contrast, the doctor who was called to treat Bellingham when he fell ill lived at Llanglas, which translated means 'green verdant place.'[31] Perhaps these contrasting place names were intended to represent the triumph of hope over despair, as Bellingham recovered whereas Willie did not.

'A small, busy town on a plain'

The journey out from 'the little mountain village'(*Ruth* 62) in North Wales is to Eccleston, a fictional, 'busy' town, located in an apparently rural environment. Shelston has identified Eccleston as Macclesfield, largely via its rather vague but

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[29] Bellingham's perception of the road is endorsed by a contemporary guidebook: 'The road from Ffestiniog to Pen trê Voelas is one of the bleakest and most solitudinous in all Wales chiefly running over a vast elevated tableland.' Cliffe 221.
However, there is slightly less accuracy in Bellingham's perception of the distance for according to Cathrall, there are fourteen and a half miles between Ffestiniog and Pen trê Voelas. William Cathrall, *Wanderings in North Wales* (London, 1851) 219. Interestingly the landlady in *Ruth* was incorrect too when she comments,: 'Indeed, sir, Pen trê Voelas is not above eighteen miles-it may not be much above seventeen.' (*Ruth* 63) So Gaskell's evocation of the place is realistic but not spatially accurate. The reason, of course, may be that **because** the road was so bleak the perceptual distance was greater. Although the distances are not accurate, Gaskell's description of the moorland road as 'bleak' is absolutely correct (confirmed by a field visit, October 1999). For about half the distance between Pen trê Voelas and Ffestiniog the road crosses a featureless plateau covered with **nothing** but moorland vegetation.

[30] Merfyn Jones, 'Elizabeth Gaskell's North Wales,' *Journal of the Merioneth Historical and Record Society,* (1993): 272.

[31] *Black's Picturesque Guide through North and South Wales,* 10th ed. (Edinburgh,1860) x.

sufficiently identifiable situation which fits neatly into the geography of *Ruth* as hypothesised so far. The town of Eccleston lies on a plain beyond which 'arose round waving uplands' (*Ruth* 133). Shelston suggests that when approaching from North Wales, 'one would indeed travel across the (Cheshire) plain', and approach 'moors and rising ground'(*Ruth* 132).[32] The 'waving uplands' and 'rising ground' describe the foothills of the Pennines which form the eastern boundary of the Cheshire Plain. As Macclesfield is located right on the eastern extremity of the plain, the town itself is quite hilly.

The argument for Gaskell's topographical accuracy can be supported by experiences from her life. She made the transition from mountain to plain several times as she was a frequent visitor to North Wales. She knew it was advisable to 'come down gradually from mountains, not at once from Snowdonia to flat Lancashire' (and the Cheshire plain as well) (*Letters* 16).

Gaskell also knew the topography of the Macclesfield area from her personal experience of visiting friends who lived in the Cheshire countryside.

Bollington, a small mill town which, like Macclesfield, lies in the foothills of the Pennines was home to the Samuel Gregs, a Unitarian family. Their house 'The Mount' lies at the top of a steep incline overlooking the surrounding hills and his mill in the adjacent valley and 'Gaskell often stayed with them.'[33]

Finally, there was another close connection with Macclesfield. Henry Winkworth, the father of Gaskell's good friends, the Winkworth sisters and brother, owned a silk mill in Macclesfield. By 1858, when the silk industry was in decline, his mill was working only a three or four-day week.[34] Although there appears to be no documentary evidence, it seems likely that Gaskell would have visited his mill at some time during the 1850's, thus strengthening her knowledge of the town.

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[32] Shelston, notes, *Ruth* 463.

[33] Margaret Ingram, *Portrait of a Village* (Macclesfield Press, 1968). Alix Meynell, *What Grandmother said. The Life of Alice Dowson 1844-1927* (Cambridge: Colt Books, 1998) 13.

[34] Margaret Shaen, ed. *Memorials of Two Sisters, Susanna and Catherine Winkworth* (London: Longmans, 1908) 174.

Therefore there is both textual and biographical evidence to support Shelston's thesis that Macclesfield was the inspirational townscape for Eccleston. Certainly the author agrees, not least because it fits with the geography proposed in these pages. Whether or not Gaskell had Macclesfield in mind when she wrote the novel, whether or not the word 'Eccles' is an 'approximation of the name' Macclesfield, her intentions seems less important than the fact conveyed by the word. 'Eccles' comes from ecclesiastical.[35] The focus of the narrative after Ruth has arrived in the town is the home of the clergyman, Thurstan Benson, and his sister Faith. The focal point of their lives is their home and the chapel which are described in detail. All that happens to Ruth at this point in her life occurs within this physical and moral context; therefore, it seems reasonable to assume that the name was an intentional summary of this town and the choice is consistent with an apparent methodology in their choice. In three syllables, Eccleston summarises the town portrayed in *Ruth.*

'The sea-side'

Abermouth, another fictional name is a euphemism for a coastal location. Both 'aber' and 'mouth' imply the seaward end of, in this case, an unnamed river.[36] The tautology is deliberate because it emphasises not merely the coast but a specifically estuarine littoral zone where the tidal sand flats are woven realistically and symbolically into the action.[37] Although proportionately small, the land-sea interface plays a highly significant role it in the narrative as Ruth confronts the source of her downfall and takes control of her own life. It may appear that Gaskell plucks these euphemistic

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[35] Shelston, notes, *Ruth* 464. *Collins English Dictionary* 483.

[36] 'Technically 'aber' means river confluence, but it is also used for a river mouth. Map of North Wales by J&C Walker in *The Parliamentary Gazetteer of England and Wales* Vol. IV (London, 1847) opp. 398. In this case Gaskell is using it loosely to describe a river flowing into the sea. *Black's Picturesque Guide through North and South Wales,* x.

[37] Although Shelston acknowledges that Silverdale is the recognised inspiration for Abermouth, both the footnotes to his 1985 edition of the novel and a paper written ten years previously incline towards a Welsh-inspired location because of the name. Gérin tends to the same opinion and suggests that the 'aber' refers to Aber, the small, picturesque coastal village in the North Wales coast where Gaskell spent some of her honeymoon. Gérin feels that Gaskell amalgamated Silverdale and North Wales. My argument favours North Lancashire for the topographical reasons given. Shelston, notes 468. A. J. Shelston, 'Ruth: Mrs Gaskell's Neglected Novel,' *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 58 (1975-6): 185. Gérin 134.

names out of her head but in fact they are carefully considered although they may not be place specific.

Geographical Accuracy.

In order to complete the discussion concerning the geography of *Ruth* it is necessary to consider the spatial relationships between the places which feature in the tale. Shelston has observed that within *Ruth* there is 'the drastic telescoping of her geography.'[38] He exemplifies his point with reference to two examples. Abermouth, which Gaskell commentators have traditionally associated with Silverdale, lies 'within twenty miles distance of Eccleston' (*Ruth* 251). If Macclesfield was the place she had in mind for Eccleston, Abermouth is more than sixty miles distant. Due to her familiarity with this part of East Cheshire and the frequency with which she visited Silverdale, it might be expected that Gaskell would have had some idea of how far it was. However, the speed at which she wrote[39] and her lack of meticulous checking of such details could account for this inaccuracy, if inaccuracy it was. Shelston does not commit himself about the intention behind the telescoping of the geography. It may have been part of the smokescreen. Secondly, Shelston interprets what Miss Benson says to Ruth as the fact 'that Eccleston is only "eighteen miles " from the sight of the Welsh mountains.'[40] If his interpretation is correct then she did telescope distances. However, I think it is possible to read the text from a slightly different geographical angle. Miss Benson remarks 'apologetically' to Ruth, 'see we are losing sight of the Welsh mountains. We have about eighteen miles of plain, and then we come to the moors and the rising ground, amidst which Eccleston lies' (*Ruth* 132). Miss Benson is far from specific about where they were when she made the comment but assuming that the Welsh mountains are visible well into the Cheshire Plain, the comment may be more accurate than first appears.[41] The inclusion of distance gives the impression

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[38] Shelston, notes, *Ruth* 468.

[39] *Ruth* was written between January and November of 1852.

[40] Shelston, notes, 468.

[41] Green refers to hearsay that 'it is just possible to see Snowdon from Knutsford, 75 miles off.' His observation is that Snowdon may be mistaken for a 'nearer mountain, Cym y Brain', 40 miles away.

of spatial specificity but like so many such references it does not bear close examination. It seems Gaskell includes quantitative distances because they provide authenticity although she may not have known how far it was because she tended to travel by sea rather than overland to North Wales.[42] Telescoping the distances is also exemplified by Bellingham's apparent ability to return to Fordham on foot to collect his carriage and return to Ruth in the 'unfrequented inn' within an hour. Unless his estate was located on the eastern side of Fordham, details which Gaskell does not include, it would be difficult to make the three mile return journey in such a short time. However, although orientation and directions do not match reality and distances are telescoped, Gaskell's geographical representation does not detract from its ability to function in her own mind to produce effective spatial reality for the purposes of her story. Nevertheless, a question remains unanswered. How is it possible to account for the location of Fordham in 'the eastern counties' when it seems that the inspiration originated in the provincial townscape and rural landscape of Cheshire? An attempt has been made to see if the sprinkling of real place names in connection with the route the couple followed to reach their destination in North Wales could provide endorsement for Cheshire-inspired Fordham.

Ruth and Bellingham would have had to travel on the main London-Holyhead road (now the A5) irrespective of the direction from which they came (see Fig. 3.2). Pen trê Voelas is a major staging post on this road about 20 miles east north east of Llan-dhu. The 'comfortable village inn at the intersection of four roads' would have been used to rest and change horses and to change carriages.[43] To reach Llan-dhu from

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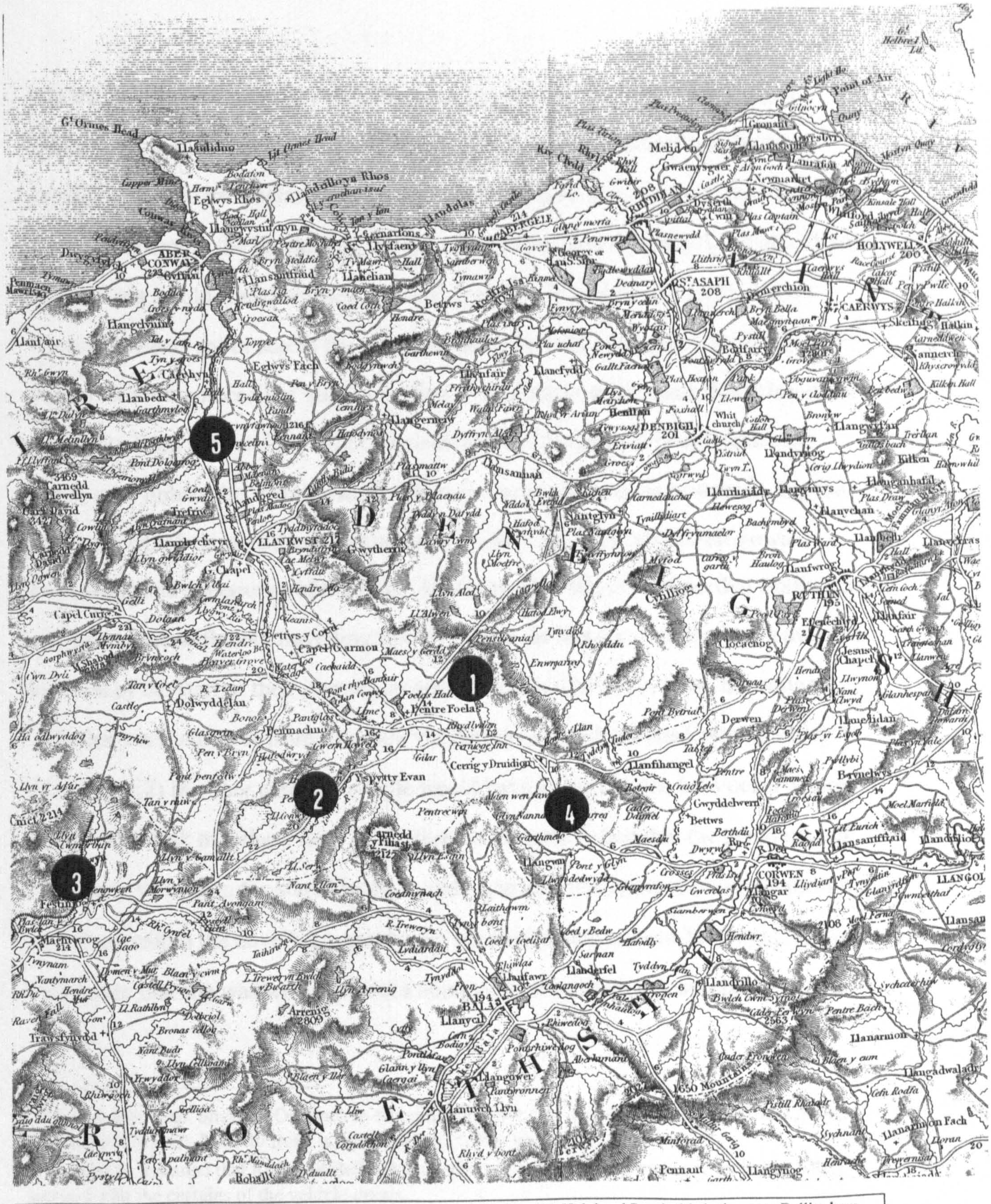
Henry Green, *Knutsford: Its Traditions and History* (Knutsford, 1859) 6. Current received opinion does not endorse Green's evidence. Joan Leach, letter to the author, 13 Oct. 1999. Therefore it is likely that Shelston is perfectly correct. After all Gaskell elongated the distance along the moorland road to Llan-dhu, therefore she could easily have telescoped the distance between Cheshire and North Wales.

[42] Cliffe, 15. A vivid, if rather implicit, description of the sights along the route can be found in Gaskell's letter to her sister-in-law in 1838. There is mention of Priestholme or Puffin Island, 'ships returning from foreign ports' and Beaumaris-all of which Gaskell had seen when travelling on the North Wales ferry from Liverpool. *Letters* 21. The ferry that started as early as 1823 was the form of travel that most people would have used. Chapple, *The Early Years* 296-309.

[43] Each inn had its own 'car' and it is likely that Ruth and Bellingham would have taken the car from the inn at Pen trê Voelas to Llan-dhu. Cliffe 86.


1
2
3
4
5
ANGLESEY
CARNARVONSHIRE
DENBIGHSHIRE
FLINTSHIRE
MERIONETHSHIRE
Pen trê Voelas
Ffestiniog
Llan-dhu
Conway Valley
London-Holyhead Road
Point of Air
Gt Ormes Head
Lit Ormes Head
Llandudno
Conway
ABERGELE
RHUDDLAN
ST ASAPH
DENBIGH
RUTHIN
LLANGOLLEN
HOLYWELL
CAERWYS
LLANRWST
CORWEN
BALA
LLANGOLLEN
Penmaen Mawr
Penmaen Bach
Dwygyfylchi
Llanfair
Llangelynin
Eglwys Rhos
Llandulas
Llansantffraid
Llanelian
Bettws
Llanfair
Caerhun
Eglwys Fach
Llanbedr
Llangernew
Llansannan
Llanfihangel
Llanrwst
Llanddoged
Trefriw
Carnedd Llewellyn
Carn David
Llandrillo
Llanarmon
Llangadwaladr
Llanarmon Fach
Llanuwch Llyn
Llanycil
Llangower
Arrenig
Dolwyddelan
Pentre Foelas
Capel Curig
Capel Garmon
Betws y Coed
Llanrwst
Trawsfynydd
Festiniog
Maentwrog
Penmachno
Cerrig y Druidion
Llyn Aled
Llyn Alwen
Llyn Crafnant
Llyn Geirionydd
Llyn Conwy
Llyn Morwynion
Llyn Celyn
Llyn Tegid
Llyn Arenig
Llyn Trawsfynydd
Llyn Ogwen
Llyn Cowlyd
Llyn Eigiau
Llyn Llydaw
Llyn Glaslyn
Llyn Cwellyn
Llyn Nantlle
Llyn Padarn
Llyn Peris
Llyn Llydaw

Pen trê Voelas, it is necessary to take one of the intersecting roads via Yspytty Evan.[44] Both these place names are mentioned in the text. Bellingham seems familiar with Pen trê Voelas as a place through which he had just travelled[45] judging by his comment to the landlady of the inn. 'Nay Jenny, you're strangely altered, if you can turn out an old friend on such as evening as this. If I remember right, Pen trê Voelas is twenty miles across the bleakest mountain road I ever saw' (*Ruth* 62). The phrase: 'if I remember right' suggests a longer time interval implying that this may be a memory from his previous visit two years before. The chambermaid names the minor road link as the 'Yspytty road'. There is a sense of familiarity surrounding the ease with which these real names appear in the text, an index of Gaskell's own knowledge and experience of the route. However they fail to confirm that Bellingham and Ruth were definitely travelling from Cheshire. In fact these references leaves the location of the start of their journey enigmatic. It could be either from 'the eastern counties' via London or from Cheshire via Bettws-y- Coed and the Conway valley.[46] (See Fig. 3.2) In either case, the couple would have arrived at Pen trê Voelas before taking the 'bleak moorland road.' Therefore having established that the geographical discrepancy between the stated location and apparent inspiration of Fordham cannot be solved within the novel's geography, an alternative source must be sought. Gaskell was aware that she was writing about a controversial and socially unacceptable

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[44] *Llangollen,* map Sheet 31 One inch to one mile Reprint of the 1st edition, 1833. (Newton Abbott: David and Charles). Yspytty Evan is three miles from Pen trê Voelas.

[45] It must be assumed that Ruth and Bellingham had not been aware of the scenery on route as they arrived with the curtains of the vehicle drawn.

[46] Gaskell became familiar with North Wales during her teenage years and her first visit appears to have been 1827. In her letter of 17 July 1838 Gaskell makes reference to her previous visits to North Wales although no dates are given. *Letters* 16. On their Honeymoon tour, she and William followed the recognised picturesque route which would have increased her familiarity with the region. John Chapple, 'The Gaskell Honeymoon,' *Gaskell Society Newsletter* 9 (Mar 1990): 5-7. This might have been the route that she imagined Ruth and Bellingham took to Llan-dhu assuming that they were travelling from Cheshire. In 1845 after Willie fell ill they went to the coast and would have travelled home from there, so she may not have been especially familiar with the main mail coach road or the 'Yspytty road'. However, from the way she uses the phrase 'The Yspytty road' some degree of familiarity seems to exist.

subject so it is probable that she decided to disguise the familiar place which inspired the first part of the novel.[47] She threw what seems to have been an effective smokescreen around the geography of this early part of *Ruth* by locating Fordham in 'the eastern counties' although she was actually using Knutsford and the Cheshire landscape for inspiration. This seemingly effective smokescreen amounts to three words, 'the eastern counties', and it was a deliberate attempt to distance herself, her friends, acquaintances and the local environment from the subject matter of the novel whilst enabling her to write about familiar and much loved places. In fact Gaskell was very clever because the smokescreen does not throw the geography of the novel into chaos either. As been established, Ruth and Bellingham would have had to travel along the London-Holyhead road via Pen trê Voelas wherever they had begun their journey. Therefore the reader can follow his/her own imaginative route rooted firmly in either of the alternative realities.

RUTH'S TOWNSCAPES

Unlike the Manchester of *Mary Barton,* neither Fordham nor Eccleston are mappable places by virtue of the fact that Gaskell fictionalised them. There is movement through their streets but Gaskell's approach is general and impressionistic rather than specific, so that the streets which are 'quiet, 'thronged', un-named, 'dark', 'narrow' and 'plebeian' bear no spatial relationship to one another.[48] In both towns the focus of the action takes place within public and domestic interiors and Gaskell's interest appears to centre upon the socio-economic townscape rather than in the creation of mappable space.

Fordham. 'From grandeur to squalor'-social change in a small town.

Ruth begins in a provincial assize town named Fordham which is located in hunting country. If the name Knutsford were substituted for Fordham, the sentence would remain factually correct. However, the focus of Gaskell's attention here is the process

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[47] The smokescreen may also have been a response to the furore which had greeted *Mary Barton*, an experience she did not care to repeat.

[48] These are all descriptors of *Ruth's* townscapes scattered through the text.

of social change and its physical manifestation in Fordham's townscape as a context for her protagonists. The novel opens fifty years after the patronage of Fordham had waned as, 'these county-families as contented themselves with the gaieties of a provincial town [...] go duly up to London in the season, and have sold their residences in the county-town fifty years ago' (*Ruth*1; 2).

The physical manifestation of this change is evident in the townscape of Fordham, as 'the deserted mansions have been turned into many smaller dwellings or even [...] into shops!' (*Ruth* 2,3). However, although 'the picturesque grandeur' was subsequently replaced by 'the flat, mean unrelieved style of George the Third' (*Ruth* 2,3), a legacy of fine architecture remained. Decorative wall panels, stained glass windows and staircases could be found behind the preserved facades.[49] In Gaskell's time the main street of Knutsford was a mix of architectural styles, including both the 'picturesque grandeur' (*Ruth* 1) of former times and buildings of the Georgian era. It was fashionable and cheaper to build facades on to the old timber framed buildings[50] and there are examples of this process still visible today in King Street in Knutsford.[51]

The extent to which Knutsford experienced the process of social change that characterised Fordham is less clear, however. Other small details such as reduction in the number of windows, narrow streets and poor lighting in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries correlate closely with Knutsford to provide further verification[52] that the town was the model for Fordham.

It is within this historical and social context, that Gaskell introduces the reader to her protagonist. As a penniless orphaned farmer's daughter, Ruth is living, and working as an apprentice dressmaker, in one of the converted 'grand old houses' (*Ruth* 2). In Mrs

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[49] Anne Thackeray Ritchie, preface, *Cranford* by Elizabeth Gaskell (London: Macmillan 1907) xxiii.

[50] Mark Girouard, *The English Town* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990) 106 and 124.

[51] Geoffrey King, *A Portrait of Knutsford* (Wilmslow: Sigma, 1988) 27.

[52] K. Goodchild, P.Ikin and J.Leach, *Looking Back at Knutsford* (Timperley: Willow Publishing, 1984) The photograph of Henry Antrobus' house built in 1770 depicts bricked up windows due to Pitt's window tax. 25. King, 31. Green, 144. 'Knutsford and its street lamps,' *Knutsford Guardian* 1 Sept. 1996. I am grateful to Joan Leach for drawing my attention to this article.

Mason's establishment, her physical surroundings, both within and without, are a constant reminder of the 'faded grandeur' of the town. The interior retains several fine architectural features, and 'the old stables' without, which would have housed the horses of the gentry, have been converted into 'a dismal street of mean-looking houses back to back with the ancient mansions'. It is change from 'grandeur to squalor' (*Ruth* 5). True to her belief in the intimate connection between human beings and their environment, Gaskell emphasises Ruth's awareness of, and response to, her physical surroundings in the first chapters of the novel. She prefers to sit beside the beautiful, decoratively and intricately painted flowery wall panels in what would have been the 'magnificent' drawing room but is now the workroom (*Ruth* 6). When the girls are granted 'an interval of half an hour' (*Ruth* 3) from the seemingly endless stitching, it was Ruth who 'sprang' to the window to gain a glimpse of another dimension of life (*Ruth* 4). Images of enclosure, claustrophobia and imprisonment are used by the author to depict Ruth's response to her environment. She presses against the window 'as a bird presses against the bars of its cage' (*Ruth* 4). Subtly Gaskell reinforces the impression of enclosure by the larch, the lone tree which stands in the garden. Previously it had stood in 'a pleasant lawn' but now the lawn was divided into yards and squalid back premises and the tree was pent up and guided about with flag-stones' (*Ruth* 5). Ruth herself is romantically portrayed by the image of the 'poor old larch!' (*Ruth* 5) and Gaskell's rhetorical observations highlight her sympathy with Ruth's plight. It is an attempt to demonstrate symbolically how social change and its physical manifestation stifles nature and how neither the tree nor Ruth, at this point in her life, have any control over their destiny. This vivid image imaginatively highlights the narrator's underpinning belief in the link between human beings and their environment.

Initially, the narrative of the novel is driven by Fordham's location and function. Such provincial towns would have held balls both the hunting season and assize sessions

when the local gentry were in residence.[53] Due to the discontinuation of assize balls,[54] a hunt ball is to be held in Fordham so Mrs Mason and her girls are busy stitching gowns for her wealthy clientele. In addition the dressmaker has been asked to supply seamstresses to carry out running repairs to gowns damaged during the dancing. Ruth, was one of those selected to attend and never having had such an opportunity before 'she almost danced along, [...] to the shire-hall' (*Ruth* 12-13). Ruth's demeanour here raises the reader's expectations in anticipation as the narrative is driven forward towards the dramatic episode of the hunt ball. Knutsford had 'elegant assembly rooms'[55] rather than a 'shire-hall' (*Ruth* 13) which were another effort at disguise perhaps. Girouard comments that 'by 1770, all but the smallest towns had assembly rooms.' [56] Gaskell used these assembly rooms on a number of occasions in her novels, and as she reveals in *A Dark Night's Work* they held a special place in her heart:

> He had been at many assemblies abroad, but still the little old ballroom attached to the George Inn in his native town was to him a place grander and more awful than the most magnificent saloons he had seen in Paris or Rome. (*ADNW* 3) [57]

In the 'old magnificence' of this vividly evoked 'vast apartment' with its richly painted Gothic window, lofty roof and walls hung with 'county worthies' (*Ruth* 13), Ruth was again surrounded by an atmosphere of past grandeur. In the anteroom, her chance encounter with Henry Bellingham, gentleman and small estate owner, was to change the course of her life. A second chance encounter by Fordham's river the following day provided the opportunity for Bellingham to pursue Ruth. Whereas

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[53] Girouard, *The English Country Town* 134.

[54] Gaskell may have taken this from experience but as yet no reference to their discontinuation has been discovered by this author despite research. It may have been Gaskell's imaginative input but does not detract from the authenticity. The same may be true of the presence of seamstresses at balls and dances. I have been unable to confirm this fact; Joan Leach thinks it plausible but knows of no confirmatory source either.

[55] J. Aiken, *A Description of the Country from 30-40 miles round Manchester* (London, 1795) 422.

[56] Girouard, *The English Town* 129. Assembly rooms appear in most of Gaskell 'Knutsford-based' novels as will be discussed in Chapter 6.

[57] Elizabeth Gaskell, A *Dark Night's Work*, ed.. Suzanne Lewis (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 1992).

Bellingham was enraptured by her physical beauty, Gaskell's emphasis on the faded grandeur of Ruth's physical environment, the imagery of enclosure and imprisonment, and the pervasive sense of loneliness, on Sundays especially, demonstrate Ruth's motives. They were determined by her environment and represent an attempt to escape from the circumstances in which she found herself; that is, of a lonely orphaned dressmaker's apprentice living in small town Fordham. Ironically Bellingham is a member of that section of society whose faded grandeur had surrounded and imprisoned Ruth since she arrived in Fordham.

From the social change manifest in the buildings of Fordham to Bellingham's dramatic rescue of the orphan from the river, Gaskell seeks to emphasise the social structure of Fordham rather than create a map of the town. The rescue on the river includes carefully observed details of the river and its channel which bear no resemblance to the brook on which Knutsford stands.[58] She must have drawn on knowledge of rivers elsewhere,[59] verification that she did not replicate Knutsford in Fordham. The rescue increases the narrative pace as the drama unfolds, for it brings Bellingham and Ruth into close contact again, and makes Bellingham a heroic figure in Ruth's eyes[60] whilst giving Bellingham the opportunity to seek further meetings with Ruth, one of which becomes a turning point in Ruth's life. Although the place has not been identified, the scene is a minor example of Gaskell's technique of using the physical environment both deterministically and to create dramatic tension. Thus

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[58] *Cheshire*, map Sheet XXVII.9 Twenty five inches to one mile (Southampton: Ordnance Survey, 1877) barely distinguishes Lily Brook, the small stream flowing out of Tatton Mere.

[59] I have not been able to find any documented inspirational source for this dramatic location. The noise and speed of the current suggests a river far larger than many local streams. There seems to be a discrepancy in her description between the use of the word river and stream. At one moment, it is a 'strong full river which eternally moved on towards the sea' and the next moment it is a stream with a 'sullen roar' and fast flowing current (*Ruth* 22). As it is her custom to use her experience on which to base such scenes of dramatic tension, it would seem that this spot bears some resemblance to reality. This scene is, like so much of her topography, a combination of 'observation and invention'. J.G. Sharps, *Mrs Gaskell's Observation and Invention.*

[60] This scene is reminiscent of Jem's heroic deeds during Carson's mill fire in *Mary Barton* Chapter V 54-62.

character and place are inextricably linked and the philosophy interwoven into the novel's fabric.

Eccleston - 'An ecclesiastical cocoon'

Like Fordham, Gaskell's portrait of Eccleston is non-spatial and highly selective. She creates an impression of the town for the reader before Ruth reaches the place which is to be her ultimate destination. Benson has told Ruth on their first meeting that he lived 'in a *busy* town' (*Ruth* 6) (my italics) which is recognisable from miles distant by the 'low grey cloud of smoke' (*Ruth* 133) which hangs over the town as Ruth approaches across the plain.[61] Both these characteristics convey the impression that Eccleston is industrial, which endorses Shelston's suggestion that the location which informed Eccleston was Macclesfield, a successful silk manufacturing town. However, with her usual fine sense of irony, Gaskell does not meet the reader's initial expectations. On Ruth's arrival in the town, the narrative closes in to focus exclusively on the Benson household. It is within this enclosed, domestic environment with its moral and religious dimension that Ruth gives birth to Leonard and is nurtured by the Bensons and their housekeeper Sally.[62] Their beneficial influence enables her to grow emotionally and intellectually. Whereas Mrs Bellingham of the 'The Priory; Fordham', would have consigned Ruth to the town's Penitentiary, Mr Benson, Dissenting clergyman of Eccleston, restored Ruth's self-respect. Whilst their impoverished circumstances do not permit them to replace their threadbare carpet, their infinite care of, and faith in, Ruth enables her to return to society and ultimately to determine her own destiny. The gradual opening up of the narrative within Eccleston is marked by Bradshaw who , impressed by Ruth's penitence, purity and truthfulness, offers her the position of governess to his two younger daughters. From the 'cold drab gloom' (*Ruth* 231) of the Bradshaw home, the narrative moves briefly

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[61] The pall of smoke may be Gaskell's perception of Manchester rather than Macclesfield. It is reminiscent of the view of Manchester from Dunham in *Libbie Marsh's Three Eras.* Lewis, ed., *A Dark Night's Work,* 183.

[62] Easson, 'Noah's Ark and Birds' Nests: Domestic Space in *Ruth*'. This chapter focuses on landscape rather than on domestic space, therefore it complements rather than competes with Easson's research.

out of Eccleston to Abermouth, a move which, although necessary for the youngest daughter's health, coincides with Parliamentary elections in Eccleston. This move from 'the quiet streets' (*Ruth* 235) of an industrial town to seaside resort is a turning point in Ruth's life as she encounters Bellingham at Abermouth after a gap of six years. The move is also a watershed in the narrative. From the moment of Ruth's return to Eccleston, the town is transformed from its 'quiet streets' to the 'busy' place of the reader's initial expectations as Gaskell builds the tension leading to the moment of truth about Ruth's previous life. The private domestic world of the Bensons' home becomes the public world of parliamentary elections which is symbolised in the physical adaptation of the interior.(*Ruth* 253) Narrative pace increases as the story presses forward carrying Ruth and the reader towards her destiny in caring for those who succumb to typhus during the epidemic which afflicts all sections of society within the town.

Although her familiarity with Macclesfield was limited, she was able to draw on her experience to create an appropriately realistic environment for Ruth's continuing journey through life. Evidence from letters suggests that she knew the town largely as a staging post for she travelled through rather than to Macclesfield, usually on her way to visit the Gregs at Bollington. In 1847, she left the train at Macclesfield and continued her journey by 'fly' as the railway went on to Crewe (*Letters* 178).[63] On a subsequent visit the journey was made from Capesthorne by carriage in the company of 'Miss Watson, who came with me as far as Macclesfield' (*Letters* 178). As a passenger in transit Gaskell would have gained an impression rather than a map of Macclesfield which enabled her to convey Ruth's first encounter with the town authentically. Although movement and street furniture play their part, above all it is the sounds which create the sense of the place. 'Rumbling stones, lamp-posts, a sudden stop, and they were in the town of Eccleston; and a strange, uncouth voice, on the dark side of the coach, was heard to say, 'Be ye there, measter?' (*Ruth* 133-4)

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[63] A 'fly' is the appropriate vehicle for they were used as transport from railway stations. Lewis, *A Dark Night's Work* 308.

Ben's words, like those of the Bensons' domestic servant Sally, were spoken in a local northern dialect unfamiliar to Ruth. Gaskell frequently used local speech as an index of place,[64] and she reinforced Ruth's sense of the unfamiliar when she gave a detailed description of Sally's clothes. Such tiny details appear frequently to denote a particular place in Gaskell's work. In *Sylvia's Lovers,* the author's attention focuses upon the girls' stockings and footwear,[65] in *Mary Barton,* the focus is upon the shawls of the working classes.[66] All these clothes indicate northern locations. Sally's outfit is almost identical to the list of clothing items that someone of Sally's status living in Macclesfield could be expected to own:[67]

> The square stout, bustling figure, neat and clean in every respect, but dressed in the peculiar, old-fashioned costume of the county, namely, a dark-striped linsey-woolsey petticoat, made very short, displaying sturdy legs in woollen stockings beneath; a loose kind of jacket called there a "bedgown" made of pink print; a snow white apron and cap, both of linen, and the latter made in the shape of a "mutch"; -these articles completed Sally's costume and were painted on Ruth's memory.' (*Ruth* 136)

There is perhaps a sense that such a picture was also imprinted on Gaskell's memory, hence her faithful rendition of the outfit. Sally plays an informative role in Ruth's development so this vivid picture is painted deliberately by the author to draw the reader's attention to a key character who epitomises the place in which Ruth has found herself. Through the clothing this character is inextricably linked with the 'north.' The other documented evidence to support Gaskell's familiarity with Macclesfield relates to her Sunday worship at the Unitarian Chapel in 1852, one occasion when she was not merely in transit. In his footnote, Shelston refers to the letter in which she describes 'the hilly walk and the hot little chapel' (*Letters* 178) to support his identification of King Edward Chapel in Macclesfield as the one which informed

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[64] In both *Mary Barton* and *Sylvia's Lovers* especially Gaskell employs this technique. The dialects are recognisably northern especially due to the use of the combination of 'ea' in words which are more usually spelt with only an 'a'.

[65] Elizabeth Gaskell, *Sylvia's Lovers,* ed. Andrew Sanders (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1982) 13.

[66] Elizabeth Gaskell, *Mary Barton,* ed. Edgar Wright (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987) 3.

[67] Gail Malmgreen, *Silk Town: Industry and Culture in Macclesfield 1750-1835* (Hull: Hull University Press, 1985) 82.

Ruth.[68] 'It is approached by a narrow passage'[69] which Gaskell describes as a narrow street or *cul-de-sac'* (*Ruth* 151), an unmistakable feature, unique amongst the three local Unitarian chapels. For all three chapels were almost identical architecturally in that they shared 'outside staircases at each end of the building which led to the galleries' and the irregular roof and worn stone steps which looked grey and stained by the weather' (*Ruth* 152).[70] However, the chapel and the Benson home, almost adjacent or very close by, were part of a contiguous built-up area of Eccleston. Both Dean Row, Wilmslow and Brook Street Chapel in Knutsford could be considered rural and neither had an adjacent chapel house. Gaskell describes the site of the chapel thus:

> Dissenters [...] hid their places of worship in obscure and out-of-the way parts of the towns. Accordingly, [...] as in the present case,[...] the buildings immediately surrounding [...] looked as if they carried you back to a period a hundred and fifty years ago. (*Ruth* 151-2)

Shelston endorses the essentially urban location of the chapel in his footnote to the novel.[71] Therefore, on the basis of its architectural attributes and the plan of the buildings it would seem that there is strong evidence to support the thesis that Gaskell used the King Edward Chapel in Macclesfield chapel to inform her novel. However, the point may be taken further because Gaskell elaborates also on the surrounding environment of the chapel. This additional evidence suggests that its creation may have been an imaginative amalgam of all three local Dissenting chapels. Although the fictional chapel has buildings adjacent to it, the chapel grounds include a graveyard in which there was an 'old wych-elm' (*Ruth* 152), flowering trees and plants. In Macclesfield this area was limited to a small grass plot in front of the chapel.[72] Brook Street Chapel in Knutsford had a graveyard with trees. An early

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[68] Shelston, notes, *Ruth* 465.

[69] Stella Davies, ed. *History of Macclesfield* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1961) 322.

[70] Chapple describes Brook Street Chapel in Knutsford as being surrounded by 'trees, fields and a brook in the valley of the town moor, until the eye was caught by the buildings of Cross Town on the rising ground beyond'.

[71] Shelston, notes, *Ruth,* 465.

[72] John Earles, *The Streets and Houses of Old Macclesfield* (Leeds: MTG Rigg, 1940) 41.

Victorian pen and ink sketch of the building which depicts both its rural nature and specifically an 'old wych-elm' (*Ruth* 152) can be used to support the thesis that Eccleston chapel bore some resemblance to this chapel.[73] However, the 'green gloom' (*Ruth* 152) was created by the ivy-clad exterior rather than overshadowing trees. Therefore the inspiration may have derived from Dean Row because that chapel was covered with ivy and had trees in its graveyard.[74] Gaskell had visited Dean Row in September 1851, not eighteen months before she began to write *Ruth* (*Letters* 159; 840).[75] Therefore she was familiar with all three buildings so it is seems probable that her fictional creation was the result of imaginative amalgamation.

Eccleston - Ruth emerges from the chrysalis.

Gaskell's technique of amalgamation is not confined to places in the novel; she used it in relation to events as well. It seems likely that she was inspired by the general election of the autumn of 1852[76] for the Parliamentary elections in Eccleston and that she drew upon her knowledge of Knutsford rather than Macclesfield to write about the event. She much more familiar with Knutsford and would have had greater knowledge of the political process in that town. It would seem likely that Mr Cranworth who lived at 'the Hall' (254) in Eccleston was inspired by the Egertons who lived at Tatton in Knutsford.[77] Gaskell drops a clue into the text which helps to support this suggestion.

> Mrs Bradshaw sighed and bemoaned herself in all her leisure moments, which were not many, and wondered why their house was to be turned into an inn for this Mr Donne, when everyone knew the 'George' was good enough for the Cranworths, who never thought of asking electors to the Hall. (*Ruth* 253-4)

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[73] Watercolour by Anna Brandreth 1855. A copy was kindly supplied by Joan Leach.

[74] Crosby, Plate 71, 78. Nikolaus Pevsner, and Edward Hubbard, *Cheshire* The Buildings of England (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990) Plate 56.

[75] The marriage was between Emily Winkworth and William Shaen. William Gaskell officiated.

[76] There was 'a degree of corruption' in this general election which is echoed in the novel. The returning Parliament 'earned the knickname 'The Bribery Parliament'. Robert Blake, *Disraeli* (London: Eyre and Spottiswood, 1966) 322.

[77] Nevertheless, the Egertons were Conservative members of Parliament for the area during Gaskell's lifetime. Chapple, *The Early Years* 115-6. The details about Stamford can be found in Mark Girouard, *Town and Country* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992) 35-44.

The 'George' was one of the principal coaching inns in Knutsford, and the location of the oft-cited Assembly Rooms. Therefore Gaskell seems to be drawing on her experience of Knutsford under the guise of Eccleston. However, the locational inspiration may be less significant than the fact that not only do the elections help to determine the lives of the characters but they are also an integral part of the structure of the novel. They help to drive the narrative forward and highlight Gaskell's theme of the morality of telling lies in order that 'good may come' (*Ruth* 255).

The Parliamentary elections take place six years after Ruth arrived in Eccleston. Elizabeth has fallen ill and she leaves Eccleston to accompany her two young charges to Abermouth so that Elizabeth may recover her health. Her departure neatly coincides with the beginning of the election campaign in which Bradshaw is supporting the Liberal opposition to the long-standing Tory, Cranworth. The new candidate is Mr Donne, whom the reader knew previously as Mr Bellingham. Ruth and Bellingham need never have met again if Bradshaw had not decided to send Donne and his agent, Hickson to Abermouth to avoid Benson's Sunday sermon. The minister had 'determined' to preach on the theme of the 'Christian view of political duties', a sermon which would have encapsulated one of the themes of the novel; 'We are not to do evil that good may come' (*Ruth* 255), which has a double meaning for the narrative. Benson intended the message for 'both electors and member on the eve of the election'(*Ruth* 258) but, of course it is precisely what he had done to hide the truth of Ruth's marital status and Leonard's birth. Not only is the visit interwoven into the theme but it also acts a 'chance' factor in the equation of Ruth's destiny.

Whilst opening up the narrative to public concerns in Eccleston, Gaskell also extends and controls it by moving the story backwards and forwards between Eccleston and Abermouth to link characters and thematic content in a fluid narrative.[78] However, it is unusual for Gaskell not to use the characters to drive the narrative forward and it marks the beginning of an increased authorial control that was to characterise her later

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[78] Chapter XXII is the only one in the novel in which the narrative moves *between* places (my italics) although the author maintains control.

work. Such authorial control highlights the significance of one of the dramatic climaxes which occur in the story. Ruth's ultimate destiny is partly determined by the typhus epidemic which afflicts Eccleston and its population. This is another event in which Gaskell probably utilises experiences from beyond the realities of Macclesfield. The town did not possess an infirmary until 1860[79], seven years after the novel was published, so it seems likely that Gaskell had Manchester Infirmary in mind when she writes about Ruth's nursing work. She was very familiar with this institution through her brother-in-law Sam Gaskell, who worked there as a doctor. It is doubtful whether Gaskell's personal experience of, and familiarity with, Macclesfield would have enabled her to use it as a basis for detailed description of the conditions associated with such epidemics. In fact detail is absent from this stretch of the narrative. Although Macclesfield was a manufacturing town with Irish lodging houses and insanitary and overcrowded conditions,[80] Gaskell gives no street names which enable a map to be drawn as was possible for the Manchester of *Mary Barton.* Instead of spatial reality, Gaskell uses the language of hyperbole – as an element of didacticism, reminiscent of *Mary Barton,* creeps in – to describe its insidious, physical and psychological effects upon the population:

> There came creeping, creeping in hidden slimy courses, the terrible fever-that fever which is never utterly banished from the sad haunts of vice and misery, but lives in such darkness, like a wild beast in the recesses of his den. It had begun in the low Irish lodging-houses [...] to add to the horror, like all similar pestilences, its course was most rapid at first and was fatal in the great majority of cases-hopeless from the beginning. (*Ruth* 424) [81]

Epidemics of virulent diseases like typhus were typical of 'busy' manufacturing towns like Macclesfield, and although commentators have suggested that Gaskell had the cholera epidemic of Newcastle in mind,[82] it is possible that a similar epidemic in Manchester in 1832 inspired her. Alternatively, Gaskell may have amalgamated all

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[79] Davies 258.

[80] Malmgreen 87 and Davies 246.

[81] The same rhetorical language is used *Sylvia's Lovers* as the crowds await the incoming whaling fleet. It is an authorial aside which acts as a narrative pause and heightens the dramatic tension.

[82] Gérin 134.

her experiences of such diseases to create a fictional situation with little spatial manifestation but which had the specific purpose of playing a contributory role in determining Ruth's destiny.[83] Her desire to nurse was consistent with her character, for she had wanted to look after her friend Jenny who was dying of TB when they were both working as dressmakers for Mrs Mason. Although she survived her first period of nursing in the Infirmary, Ruth then felt compelled to nurse the father of her illegitimate son. Having restored him to health, ironically she succumbed to the fatal disease, an ending that was not universally popular. Charlotte Brontë railed against Ruth's fate in a letter to Gaskell: 'Why should she die? Why are we to shut up the book weeping? My heart fails me already at the pang it will have to undergo.' However, she continues in acceptance that Gaskell must follow 'the impulse of her own inspiration.'[84] Ruth's ultimate destiny was the result of her own free choice to nurse Bellingham, and her death, the atonement for her sin. The impulse of Gaskell's inspiration was her need to counteract her sense that the subject was not a 'fit subject for fiction.'[85]

London - the invisible metropolis.

'And she entered the carriage and drove towards London' (*Ruth* 61) is the last sentence of Chapter IV. It is with considerable surprise that the reader discovers at the beginning of Chapter V that the action has moved to Wales. This deliberate and metaphorical gap of two months is unique in Gaskell's novels up to this point. Those loyal readers familiar with *Mary Barton* would expect to be led by the characters from place to place as this is her customary method of narrative propulsion. Here, as the

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[83] Easson is less committal in his footnote about Gaskell's inspirational source for the epidemic but he highlights the role of the weather. Easson, notes *Ruth* 393. Gaskell introduces the epidemic by describing the seasonal changes in the weather in Eccleston before the outbreak of typhus fever in the town. The summer of 1852 when she wrote Ruth had some very hot spells. The Met Office confirms that 'the summer of 1852 was warm and wet-mildew did much damage to the wheat harvest'. However this evidence is far from conclusive because at this time the Met. Office did not 'keep systematic records in a common format.' The Met Office, Letter to the author, 21 April 1998. Details need to be obtained from anecdotal evidence which is far more difficult to unearth.

[84] T.J.Wise and J.A. Symington *The Brontës: The Lives, Friendships and Correspondence* vol. III (Oxford: Shakespeare Head, 1932) 332.

[85] Easson, *Elizabeth Gaskell* 109.

author controls the narrative, a chasm opens up and the reader has to make a temporal leap of two months and a spatial leap of hundreds of miles from 'the eastern counties' (or perhaps rural Cheshire) to an invisible metropolitan landscape and thence to the picturesque 'Alpine' (*Ruth* 65) country of North Wales.[86] This narrative leap is akin to that in *Sylvia's Lovers* where the reader is expected to leap imaginatively from Monkshaven to Acre.

Unlike Fordham and Eccleston, towns that possess some sense of spatial reality, London is an invisible metropolitan landscape. However, Gaskell maintains the narrative continuity via Bellingham's social and economic links with the metropolis. As a member of the landed gentry he would have possessed a rented property 'in town'[87] and he retained business interests there. It was for that reason that he was leaving Fordham so when Mrs Mason summarily dismissed Ruth he suggested that she accompany him (*Ruth* 56). At the time Gaskell was writing 'Commerce was king' in London and the city 'tapped the resources'[88] of many provincial areas so landowners like Bellingham would have had business to conduct in the city. London which appeared in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* - published just six months before *Ruth* but written contemporaneously - was more fully realised than that of Gaskell. After her initial unfamiliarity, Lucy's Snowe 'got into the heart of city life [...] . Since those days I have seen the West -end, [...] but I love the city far better. The city seems so much more in earnest: its business, its rush, its roar, are such serious things, sights, and sounds.' [89]

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[86] This narrative chasm is akin to that in *Sylvia's Lovers* in which the reader is expected to leap from north-east England to the eastern Mediterranean. See page 247.

[87] Girouard, *The English Town* 101-126.

[88] Celina Fox, *London-World City 1800-1840.* (London: Yale University Press and Museum of London, 1992) 13; 16 and 22. John Sutherland has included a chapter about the enigmatic role of London in the geography of *Ruth.* Having ensnared Ruth, Sutherland considers that Bellingham would have put at a 'hostelry and done what seducers do when innocent young things fall into their clutches. Then, on the next day, he would buy some clothes... for his new mistress'. He continues plausibly but imaginatively to fill in the narrative gap. The idea for this chapter originated with this author. John Sutherland, *Who Betrays Elizabeth Bennet?* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 1999) 102-7 105-6.

[89] Charlotte Bronte, *Villette* ed. Margaret Smith and Herbert Rosengarten (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990) 59

However, for the reader of *Ruth*, there is no such realisation; rather the metropolis appears as a metaphor for Ruth's seduction by Bellingham. Owing to the social conventions of the day, this was the unfit subject and Gaskell used the euphemism of 'London' to stand for what she was unable to describe. Ruth's deflowering brought her great unhappiness and Gaskell may have chosen London because of her own personal feelings associated with the metropolis. In an undated early letter to Mary Howitt, she writes,

> Long ago I lived in Chelsea occasionally with my father and stepmother and *very, very* unhappy I used to be; and if it had not been for the beautiful, grand river which was an inexplicable comfort to me, and a family of the name of Kennett, I think my child's heart would have been broken. (Letters 797)

It is evident from her letters that Gaskell harboured a perception of London prevalent at the time. To Tottie Fox who lived in London she wrote of the city as 'your Babylon' (*Letters* 110) and to her sister-in-law, she described it as 'hot horrible smoky wicked Babylon the Great' (*Letters* 21). With its derogatory connotations of corruption, sin and vice, her choice of the metropolis as the metaphor for Ruth's loss of her virginity is entirely appropriate. The absence of any spatial context of this real place only serves to emphasise the impact of the symbolism.

'WILDSCAPES' IN *RUTH*

The townscapes are paralleled by two landscapes which are paradoxically the same and different. Their similarity derives from their apparent and symbolic illimitability which in Gaskellian terms defines them as 'wildscapes'. The mountain-moor of North Wales[90] possesses a featureless, treeless illimitability that is echoed in the unenclosed expanse of tidal sands and mud of Abermouth. However, as one is high mountain and plateau terrain and the other a low-lying estuarine environment, realistically they could not be more different. As is so often the case in Gaskell's work, sites of high

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[90] A distinction is made between the mountain peaks and the moorland plateau in this environment. The mountains were not initially perceived as illimitable, only beautiful and part of the 'picturesque' character of Llan-dhu.

emotional drama correlate with unenclosed land-and sea-scape and *Ruth* is no exception. It is within these 'wildscapes' that the consequences of liaison between Bellingham and Ruth are enacted.[91]

NORTH WALES – Changing perceptions and spatial reality of 'glorious guardian mountains' to 'weary everlasting hills and bleak moorlands'.

In the 'Welsh' phase of Ruth, Gaskell maps out a realistic physical landscape which inextricably linked to the emotional status of the characters so that the realism of the local topography and meteorology of Ffestiniog has strong 'romantic' overtones. The reason for this is clear. For Gaskell herself, North Wales was a 'feeling' as much as a physical place. Her passion for this 'beautiful' mountain landscape is vividly demonstrated in a letter written in 1838 to her sister-in-law, 'I *long* to be in those wild places again [...] . I cannot help *feeling* the *feelings* for you. I know (how) you must be *feeling* at the last six happy weeks over & gone' (*Letters* 21), is echoed fictionally in *Ruth.* Gaskell began visiting these 'wild Welshy' places (*Letters* 21) in her teenage years when, as Chapple comments, 'the area would have made an impression upon her as it was so totally different topographically, culturally and socially from any other environment which she had experienced.'[92] Her uncle, Samuel Holland, quarry owner, entrepreneur and philanthropist, bought, renovated and extended a farmhouse, Plas yn Penrhyn, 'close to the village of Minffordd, on the hill across Traeth Mawr from Porthmadog and above the River Dwyryd', a house Gaskell adored and in which she 'is known to have stayed many times.'[93] It was to this house that Gaskell brought her newly wedded husband in 1832 and it was the refuge she sought on the publication of *Mary Barton (Letters* 21; 29; 60).[94] However, her intensely happy experiences of the area between Snowdon and the estuarine coast at Porthmadog were transformed to incapacitating grief when her baby son died having contracted scarlet fever at

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[91] The 'Hill of the Hundred' where the relationship between Ruth and Bellingham began would count as a small-scale 'wildscape'.

[92] Chapple, *The Early Years* 289.

[93] Chapple, *The Early Years* 306-307.

[94] Gérin 94. Shaen, *Memorials of two Sisters* 31.

Porthmadog. It is these heights and depths of emotion as well as her familiarity with the geography, topography and meteorology of the area which inspire and inform the 'Welsh' phase of Ruth's story. Merfyn Jones endorses this view when he comments: 'It is not surprising that it was back to this incomparably beautiful and significance-laden borderland between Glaslyn and Dwyryd, Caernarfonshire and Merioneth that the writer returned in the Welsh chapters of her fiction.' He goes further: 'the locations in which she places these characters [...] are textured into the novel rather than merely serving to provide a picturesque backdrop.'[95]

To continue Jones' metaphor, Gaskell wove the Welsh landscape into the fabric of her novel through theme, via the movement of the characters to control and drive the narrative, and through the realistic and romantic depiction of its 'glorious guardian mountains,'(*Ruth* 83) waterfalls and bleak moorlands. Within this environment the future of Ruth's relationship with Bellingham and the next phase of her life was determined. Jo Pryke, on the other hand, finds the 'Welshness' of the setting less integral to the episode than it is to the short stories like *The Well of Pen-Morfa.* However, there is a subtle distinction here between her argument and the one forwarded in these pages. Pryke's 'Welshness' can be taken to include all aspects of the physical and human environment whereas this argument is largely confined to the physical landscape.[96]

Llan-dhu 'the little mountain village' (*Ruth* 62).

Gaskell describes Llan-dhu as a village, which implies that it has a church but that no place of worship appears in the landscape.[97] In fact the reader learns very little about

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[95] Jones, 'Elizabeth Gaskell's North Wales' 274; 281

[96] Jo Pryke, 'Wales and the Welsh in Gaskell's Fiction: Sex Sorrow and Sense,' *Gaskell Society Journal* 13 (1999): 72. I would argue that there are two short stories that could have dovetailed into the discussion within this chapter. However, the deterministic role of the physical environments of North Wales and Morecambe Bay are so well illustrated by *Ruth,* that discussion of *The Well of Pen-Morfa* (a real Welsh village) and *The Sexton's Hero* (located within the shifting sands of the Kent Estuary in Morecambe Bay) has been left as the basis of a future paper.

[97] There is a fine irony here because a new chapel was built in Ffestiniog during 1845, the year that she was there and Willie died. Perhaps the chapel features more in the name of the village than might at first appear.

the settlement other than its function as a tourist centre. Both the inn and the shop offer accommodation for visitors who, at this stage of the mid-nineteenth century, were becoming more numerous. More accessible, since the introduction of ferries from Liverpool and the upgrading of the London-Holyhead road, North Wales had become part of the 'Celtic Grand Tour' since the Napoleonic wars prevented tours of the Continent.[98] There was a recognisable 'picturesque' sketchable tour through Wales, part of which was followed by the Gaskells on their honeymoon and by the Wilkie Collins family two years later.[99] Having all the ingredients of the 'picturesque', that is high mountain peaks, 'rocky gorges and rivers which meander through meadows,' Ffestiniog was 'widely visited' as a beauty spot.[100] The area had also become popular with wealthy Manchester merchants and the middle-classes who bought homes in this part the world.[101] In confining herself to Ffestiniog's tourist function, Gaskell ignored the economic development which had transformed the landscape in the Ffestiniog area. She would have been aware of changes in the landscape for they were taking place in 1827 when she stayed with her uncle, Samuel Holland, who was responsible both for the exploitation of the slate at Blaenau Ffestiniog to the north and the building of the railway along the Dwyryd valley

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[98] Cliffe 17, Jones, *The Waterfalls of Wales* 29 and Lynne Withey, *Grand Tours and Cook's Tours: A History of Leisure Travel 1750-1915.* (London: Arum Press, 1998) 46.

[99]Catherine Peters, *The King of Inventors: A Life of Wilkie Collins* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1991) 33. Peters sheds light on the sort of conditions Gaskell would have experienced when in Wales. 'It was a fairly thorough test of their ability to endure the necessary discomforts of stage-coaches and remote country inns with two small children.' Jo Pryke includes an excellent section on the context in which Gaskell had experienced Wales and then was writing about Wales. She highlights how the Welsh landscape was in the vanguard of efforts to define a picturesque landscape. Pryke, 'Wales and the Welsh in Gaskell's fiction' 72-80.

[100] Jones, *The Waterfalls of Wales* 149

[101] Gaskell had stayed at Plas Brereton near Caernarvon. *Letters,* 16, Salis Schwabe the industrialist built Glyn Garth as a holiday retreat, *Letters,* 1003. Charlotte Froude's house was 'such a pretty place [...] nestling down under a wooded hill close beneath Snowdon with a waterfall on one side of the house and a lake in front', according to Selina Winkworth. Susanna Winkworth, ed. *Letters and Memorials* vol. I 274. For its location see *1:50,000 Landranger series* Sheet number 115 Snowdon (Southampton: Ordnance Survey) Grid Ref. 630505. It is also named on the Llangollen, map Sheet 31 Reprint of the 1st ed. one inch to one mile (Newton Abbott: David and Charles) (no grid reference possible).

between Blaenau and the coast.[102] Socially too, the picture of Llan-dhu is selective. It appears middle-class, the only working population are those who service the tourists yet there was a large group of quarry men and farmers in the area.[103] None of this is featured because it bears no relevance to the tale narrated by Gaskell, whereas when the action moves to the fishing village of Abermouth, she makes dramatic use of the economic activity that characterises the shorescape.

Topographical Accuracy of the Welsh Landscape.

The fact that Gaskell knew Ffestiniog well enabled her to provide a fairly faithful and accurate topography of the area which was woven into the story. The village, which Cliffe describes 'as a wild, healthy place'[104] lies at the head of the wide, flat-floored, glaciated valley of the River Dwyryd (Vale of Ffestiniog) on a spur of land between two tributaries of the main river. The village is sited at about 600' above sea level on the break of slope so that although the land falls away steeply the site of the village is relatively flat. To meet his sister Faith, Benson has to walk down to the 'foot of the steep ascent which led up to Llan-dhu' (*Ruth* 110). Glaciated troughs are characterised by steep sides and Benson's return climb up 'the long tedious hill' (*Ruth* 113) required assistance by his sister. From his resting place on a large stone by the confluence of the Cynfal and the Drwyryd, Benson was able to survey and 'delight' in the open vista spread out before him:

> Mr Benson sat down on a great stone under the shadow of an alder bush which grew where the green, flat meadow skirted the water. It was delightful to be once more in the open air, and away from the scenes and thoughts which had been pressing on him for the last three days. There was new beauty in everything from the blue mountains which glimmered in the distant sunlight down to the flat, rich, peaceful vale with its calm round shadows, where he sat (*Ruth* 110).

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[102] Gaskell ignores the changes which resulted from the development of the slate industry and this author circumscribed by lack of space would refer the reader to John Chapple, *The Early Years* Ch. 15 and 16 especially 305-6.

[103] Chapple, *The Early Years* 306.

[104] Cliffe 219.

Gaskell's description is topographically accurate but not realistic. The mountains which 'guard' Llan-dhu are the Moelwyn Mountains located to the west-north-west of the village. Ruth refers to 'Moel Wynn' which is visible from their window at the inn (*Ruth* 66). but there are several peaks which make up the range. The highest is Moelwyn Mawr (2541'), the nearest to Ffestiniog is Moelwyn Bach (2310'). (See Fig. 3.1) These mountains tower above the wide flat floor of a glaciated valley that is sufficiently fertile to support pasture, land use characteristic of glaciated highlands. However, the realistic here is overlain by the 'romantic'. In the quoted passage, Benson's appreciation of the natural beauty as well as his relief to feel free in this more open landscape predominates over the sense of confinement he feels in Llan-dhu.[105] However, the river Dwryrd would have been busy with the commercial traffic associated with the slate quarries at Blaenau Ffestiniog.[106] So the scene is 'romanticised' to fit in with Gaskell's artistic aims.

The combination of topographical accuracy and romanticism also characterises Ruth's first encounter with Benson by the waterfalls upstream on the river Cynfal. The Afon Cynfal, the tributary of the Dwyryd which lies just to the south of Ffestiniog, has incised itself into the grey Cambrian mud- and siltstones to produce a wooded, 'precipitous gorge'[107] which is characterised by two waterfalls only several hundred yards apart. These falls are easily accessible via 'a path which runs across the fields in a tolerably direct line from the inn and then enters a wood near the river to the first falls which is about half a mile from the village'. This entry in Cliffe's 'Book of North Wales' continues with a specific description of the falls. 'One fall is about three hundred yards above and the other three hundred yards below a rustic stone bridge.

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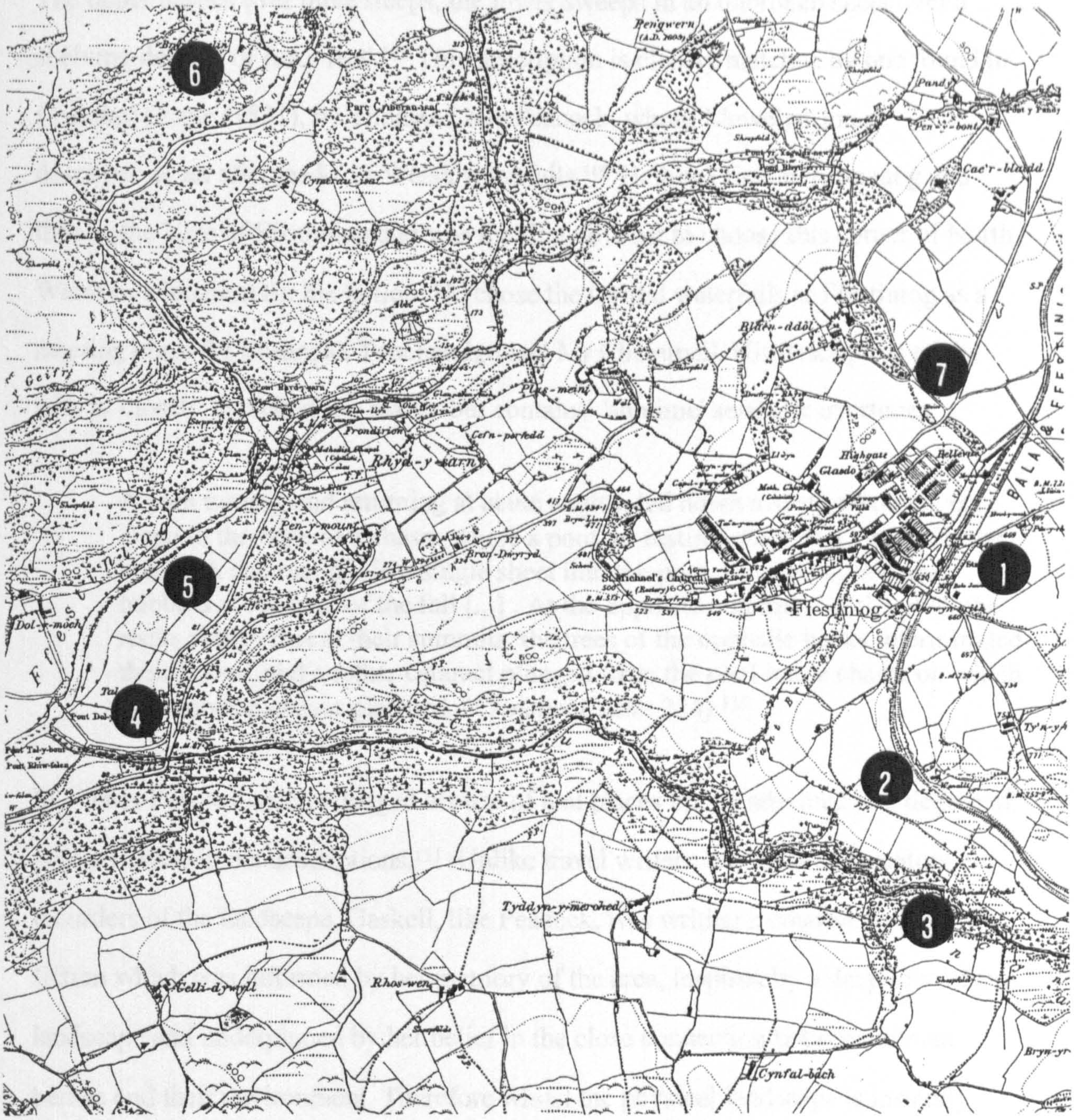
[105] These bare mountains of slate which rise on one side of the village appear black even in sunshine, therefore the name of the village is realistic as well as symbolic.

[106] M.J.T.Lewis, *Sails on the Dwyryd* (Tan y Bwlch: Snowdonia Study Centre, 1989).

[107] Jones, *The Waterfalls of Wales* 149.



1. Ffestiniog stands on a break of slope on a spur of land between the Afon Dwryrd and its tributary the Afon Cynfal
2. The footpath that Ruth would have followed to the falls.
3. The Cynfal waterfall. The river has incised itself into its valley.
4. The spot at the 'foot of the steep ascent which led to Llan-dhu' where Benson sat.
5. ' The green flat meadow skirted with water.' Benson's view of the valley floor.
6. 'Glorious guardian mountains'- The Moelwyns.
7. Ruth 'fled [...] across the road on to the unenclosed rocky common.'

Fig. 3.3 Ffestiniog- the inspiration for Llan-dhu

Source: *Merionethshire*, map Sheet XII NW Six inches to one mile (Southampton: Ordnance Survey, 1887)

The upper dashes over three steeps, the lower sweeps in an unbroken sheet over a shelving descent of forty feet'.[108] This description is closely matched by one found in *Crotchet Castle* (1831), by Thomas Love Peacock, whom Llewelyn Jones describes as 'an aficionado' of Welsh waterfalls.[109] He lived first at Tremadog and then in the Vale of Ffestiniog and was the first novelist to choose this corner of North Wales as a location for his fiction. He chose the Cynfal waterfalls at Ffestiniog as a meeting place for Susannah Touchandgo and Mr Chainmail. His description of the falls is 'closely modelled' on reality but contains 'sublime' aesthetic overtones:

> A path turning and returning at acute angles, led down a steep wood-covered slope to the edge of a chasm where a pool, or resting-place of a torrent lay far below. A cataract fell in a single sheet into the pool, the pool boiled and bubbled at the base of the fall [...] . At the opposite extremity of the pool, the rocks almost met at their summits, the trees of the opposite banks intermingled their leaves, and another cataract plunged from the pool into a chasm on which the sunbeams never gleamed. (*Crotchet Castle* 224).[110]

In a letter Peacock acknowledged his use of real places but he admitted to a degree of poetic licence in his descriptions.[111] Unlike travel writers, novelists are creators not recorders of the landscape. Gaskell, like Peacock, was writing a creative work of fiction which was informed by her memory of the area, inspired by a deep love of this landscape and underpinned by her belief in the close connection between human beings and their environment. Therefore whilst the physical landscape is instantly recognisable, it is not necessarily a replica of reality and is endowed with romantic overtones. [112]

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[108] Cliffe 220. It is clearly marked on the large scale map of the valley. *Merionethshire* map Sheet XII.6 Twenty five inches to the mile. (Southampton: Ordnance Survey, 1889).
[109] Jones, *The Waterfalls of Wales* 27.
[110] Thomas Love Peacock, *Crotchet Castle* ed. Raymond Wright (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976)
[111] Peacock used a combination of two rivers for his inspiration, the Cynfal and the Velenrhyd, both of which 'flow into the Vale of Ffestiniog. Peacock, *Crotchet Castle,* ed. Wright 280.
[112] A visit to Ffestiniog, 29 Oct. 1999 confirmed the accuracy of some Gaskell's topography. It is possible to recognise the mountain peaks and follow Ruth's path to the river. However, due to the steep declivity, accessibility to the River Cynfal is limited and possible only downstream from the falls.

Gaskell mentions only one of the falls and suggests that the stepping stones are close by:

> Ruth went down to the circular dale into which the brown-foaming mountain river fell and made a deep pool, and, after resting there for a while ran on between broken rocks down to the valley below. The waterfall was magnificent, as she had anticipated; she longed to extend her walk to the other side of the stream, so she sought the stepping-stones, the usual crossing place which were over-shadowed by trees, a few yards from the pool. The waters ran high and rapidly, as busy as life, between the pieces of grey rock; but Ruth had no fear, and went lightly and steadily on. (*Ruth* 67)

Waterfalls originate on either an outcrop of more resistant rock or on a geological fault, in the case of the Cynfal, they were initiated downstream on a fault and have subsequently receded to produce a precipitous gorge. The 'magnificence', which impresses itself upon Ruth, is the result of two factors: its height and the antecedent rainfall. Five days of rain which preceded the arrival of Ruth and Bellingham in Llan-dhu was augmented by the previous evening's storm. Inputs of high rainfall increase stream discharge, velocity and turbulent flow. Gaskell's awareness of these relationships is demonstrated in Ruth's anticipation of the waterfall as 'magnificent' and in the description of the river itself as a 'brown foaming mountain river with waters which flowed rapidly and high' (*Ruth* 67). Gaskell knew that the heavy prolonged rain would produce a spectacular sight and she went further than Peacock in merely providing a scenic backdrop. Her careful observation of stream hydrology enabled her to use the abnormally high discharge to determine the characters' actions and create a moment of drama that drives the narrative forward. Upper reaches of streams like the Cynfal are characterised by large bed loads of material. These rocks, which are moved only at times of exceptionally high discharge, therefore provide natural crossing points (although there is no record of such a crossing point near these waterfalls.)[113] The high discharges in the Cynfal at this time could either have eroded one of these boulders or concealed it below the water's surface. Whatever she

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[113] No mid-nineteenth century local guide seems to mention such crossing points. Peacock admits that it is possible to leap the Cynfal but is not explicit as to exact location. Peacock, *Crotchet Castle,* ed. Wright 280.

imagined might have occurred on this occasion, Gaskell used it to create the dramatic moment when Ruth was unable to cross unaided:

> About the middle (of the stream), however, there was a great gap; either one of the stones was so covered with water as to be invisible, or it had been washed lower down; at any rate, the spring from stone to stone was long and Ruth hesitated a moment before taking it. The sound of rushing waters was in her ears to the exclusion of every other noise; her eyes were on the current running swiftly below her feet; and thus she was startled to see a figure close before her on one of the stones, and to hear a voice offering to help. (*Ruth* 67)[114]

The offer of help came from Benson for the first but not the only time in the novel, so it could be argued that as she puts her trust in Benson at this moment she was also crossing symbolically to the next phase of her life. This dramatic moment resembles several other scenes in the novel in which knowledge and understanding of local geology and geomorphology is interwoven into events to create dramatic tension and emphasise the links between human beings and their environment.[115] Once across the stream, Benson and Ruth walk up to the bridge, which lost its hand rail in the previous night's storm, as Benson does not wish Ruth to cross the 'deep' stream without help. This bridge exists but it is built of 'rustic' stone rather than wood and is located between the falls.[116] The location of the bridge is not specified and it seems that topographical accuracy is secondary to her wish to highlight the mutual love and enjoyment of the 'beautiful country'[117] shared by Ruth and Benson at this point as they walk via Cwm Dhu. This reference is probably not a realistic landscape feature but means 'black hollow.' Their mutual feelings for the physical environment forge a link of trust which is to become crucial in the following days.

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[114] Stepping stones are shown on the *Merionethshire* map XII.6 Twenty five inches to the mile, but they are about half a mile downstream of the falls. The may have been the inspiration for the novel although they seem too far from the falls according to the text. This may be an example of 'creative recollection'.

[115] In *Mary Barton,* the chase along the river to prevent Will from sailing and several of the scenes in the littoral zone of *Sylvia's Lovers* are examples from other works.

[116] Cliffe 220.

[117] These exact words were used by Lockwood on his first acquaintance with the landscape of *Wuthering Heights.* Emily Bronte, *Wuthering Heights,* ed. Ian Jack (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1981) 1.

However, although Gaskell produced a fairly accurate topographical map of Llandhu, she also used her knowledge and experience of other places and transferred them to Wales to inspire a 'significance-laden'[118] amalgam of locations, a technique which she used, successfully in the case of Eccleston chapel, the Cheshire landscape at the beginning of *Ruth* and, extensively in *Wives and Daughters.*

The deep, round pool where Bellingham places water lilies in Ruth's hair does not fit easily into the topography of the area. Admittedly, North Wales is a glaciated landscape and this round pool could be a tarn filling a hollow formed and subsequently rounded by ice erosion, known locally as a cwm.[119] However, such a hollow would not be found in a deeply incised valley, but at much higher elevations on north or north-east facing, open, treeless slopes. Neither could a hollow of the dimensions of Deepdale be found in such a narrow deeply incised valley such as the Cynfal. The description of the pool exactly matches Deepdale near Silverdale.[120] It is an example of a doline,[121] a collapsed feature characteristic of Carboniferous Limestone that is the country rock of the North Lancashire coast. In the present day landscape its high, steep, stony sides are covered in beech woods. The top of the hollow is level with the treetops whereas at the foot of the slope, the trees tower above just as Gaskell describes in the novel:

> They sauntered out for a walk. The path they chose led to a wood on the side of a hill, and they entered, glad of the shade of the trees. At first it appeared like any common grove, but soon they came to a deep descent, on the summit of which they stood looking down on the tree-tops [...] . There was a path leading sharp down, and they followed it; the ledge of rock made it almost like going down steps, and their walk grew into a bounding and their bounding into a run [...] . Then they came to a circular pool over-shadowed by the trees,

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[118] Jones, 'Elizabeth Gaskell's North Wales' 274

[119] Gaskell is aware of 'cwms' as hollows because she defines them thus (*Ruth* 83), but seems unaware of their origin.

[120] Emily Winkworth's letter to her sister, Catherine, reminisces about her previous holidays there, and several key locations are mentioned including Deepdale. Winkworth, *Letters and Memorials* vol. 1 351.

[121] 'A doline is a circular hollow or depression in the surface of karstic terrain which may or may not lead down into a vertical shaft descending into rock'. John Whittow, *Dictionary of Physical Geography* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984) 151. See also C.A.M.King, *Northern England* (London: Methuen, 1976) 60-63 and R.J.Small, *The Study of Landforms* (Cambridge: Longmans, 1970) 153.

> whose highest boughs had been beneath their feet a few minutes before. The pond was hardly below the surface of the ground and there was nothing like a bank on any side (*Ruth* 73).

The description closely resembles reality. Today, although the pool has shrunk, the water is shallow, plant succession and human interference have changed the vegetation and fallen trees adorn the water surface, the fundamental landform is recognisably visible in the landscape. Gaskell needed the enclosed green gloom and aquatic vegetation of Deepdale to create a romantic atmosphere of apparent harmony between Ruth and Bellingham. She creates a picture akin to a pre-Raphaelite painting, in which Ruth was adorned by the circlet of water lilies which Bellingham placed in her hair:

> She stood in her white dress against the trees which grew around; her face was flushed into a brilliancy of colour which resembled that of a rose in June; the great heavy white flowers drooped on either side of her beautiful head, and if her brown hair was a little disordered, the very disorder only seemed to add a grace. (*Ruth* 74-5)

He persuades her to look at her reflection in the water. Her reflected beauty has a double effect in the scene. Subtly it reflects the intrinsic beauty of the spot and it also highlights the contrast in feelings between Ruth and Bellingham. Whilst she is concerned less with beauty and more with 'feeling, thinking and loving', her beauty was '*all* (my italics) he cared for' (*Ruth* 74) In this scene Gaskell has taken a familiar place for her inspiration, a familiar place to produce a quietly dramatic, ostensibly romantic scene. She has re-located it to suit her artistic purposes and to reinforce in the reader's mind the incompatibility of these two human beings. Within this physically enclosed hollow, Ruth is subject to Bellingham's will and not master of her own destiny.

The literary role of the Welsh topography –'The roughness of the rocky hillside saves Ruth from suicide'[122]

After Bellingham's abandonment of Ruth, her despair almost overcomes her reason. The role of the landscape at this moment demonstrates that not only did the author

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[122] Jones, 'Elizabeth Gaskell's North Wales' 278.

believe that there was an intimate connection between human beings and their environment but at times the place and its topography could play a deterministic role in lives. The old, hard rocks which underlie this glaciated landscape are resistant to erosion. Their resistance plus the effect of erosion during the Ice Age results in shallow soils which have had only 10,000 years to develop. Therefore, solid rock outcrops frequently produce awkward obstacles across otherwise grass-covered areas. Ruth fled, 'in her rush to the awful death of suicide,' from her refuge under the hawthorn tree in a grassy field enclosed by a hedge, 'across the road' on to the unenclosed land of the 'rocky common' (*Ruth* 97).[123] Benson hurried after her as fast as his disability would allow but his 'uncertain gait' caused him 'to stumble in the dusk gloaming' and fell over some '*sharp projecting stone'* and 'he lay among the white stones' (*Ruth* 97) whilst his cry arrested Ruth's flight and she returned to assist him in his distress. The pace increases as Ruth goes rapidly across the road on to the rocky common but came to a halt as she 'stopped suddenly short' (Ruth 97) on hearing his cry. The pace increases again as Ruth returns to the prostrate man and the fast pace is maintained as she 'flew' to the mountain stream to collect some 'cold fresh water to restore his consciousness' (Ruth 97). From that dramatic moment the pace slows as Ruth and Benson return to Ffestiniog and decisions are made about her future. This use of geology exemplifies Jones' observation that Gaskell 'textured' the landscape into the novel for it was the outcrop of rock which diverted Ruth from her determined path to destruction.[124]

However, Gaskell imagines that the geology is that of Lancashire rather than Ffestiniog. Whilst both areas are characterised by a uniform geology which produces rocky terrain, the Carboniferous limestone found in Lancashire is white or whitish greyish white when weathered. Around Ffestiniog, the older Cambrian mudstones

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[123] The exact location of the field and unenclosed common across the road is not evident from the text and from the map, fig. 3.3 it can be seen that the land surrounding the village is enclosed. Gaskell probably once again telescoped the distance between the village and the higher slopes where cultivation ceases and the land is open.

[124] Jones, 'Elizabeth Gaskell's North Wales' 281.

and siltstones are characteristically dark, distinctly grey rocks. Therefore, it seems that Gaskell imagined Lancashire rather than Wales when she wrote this scene for, white rocks appear throughout the Welsh phase of the novel, both the pebbles of the stream bed and the Ysyptty road are white and the circular pool is inspired by a feature typical of karst scenery, and Benson tripped over a white rock.[125] It seems as if Gaskell imaginatively moved the geological landscape from Silverdale to Wales in order to create a 'precisely delineated'[126] topography, much of which is anything but vague as it is interwoven inextricably into the lives of her characters.

Not only do the geological foundations of the topography influence destiny and allow Gaskell to control the narrative pace but the unenclosed land symbolises a place in which Ruth responds passionately to her circumstances. Reference has been made to the fact that the 'wildscape' of struck an emotional chord in Gaskell. Her feelings are embodied in Ruth's initial passionate and positive response to this environment:[127]

> In this manner they settled down to a week's enjoyment of that Alpine country. It was the most true enjoyment to Ruth. It was opening of new sense; vast ideas of beauty and grandeur, filled her mind at the sight of the mountains now first beheld in full majesty. She was almost overpowered by the vague and solemn delight; but by and by her love for them equalled her awe. (*Ruth* 65)

However it is clear from the novel that Gaskell was aware that the 'beauty grandeur and majesty' of the mountains did not have universal appeal. Unlike Ruth, Benson's sister, Faith, visiting a mountain environment for the first time, found them oppressive rather than awe-inspiring. Faith's perception also may embody her disapproving attitude to the morality of the couple, in contrast to the acceptance which they had encountered within the Welsh environment itself.[128] Gaskell also uses

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[125] Gaskell was correct in describing the rocks in the Cynfal valley by the waterfall as grey. However, it should be noted that in the Ffestiniog area are seams of quartzite within the metamorphic rocks. Sparkling white, these could have been the inspiration. Equally, the colonisation of rocks by lichen creates a white bloom, which may account for the colour of the rocks in the vicinity. Observations made in the field, 29 Oct. 1999.

[126] James Reed, *Sir Walter Scott: Landscape and Locality* (London: Athlone, 1980) 6.

[127] Jo Pryke hints at the association between Gaskell's honeymoon in Wales and the choice of Llandhu as the love-nest of Bellingham and Ruth. Pryke, 'Wales and the Welsh in Gaskell's Fiction' 72.

[128] As Pryke points out, 'Mrs Hughes, the landlady, is tolerant about Ruth's unmarried state'. Pryke, 'Wales and the Welsh in Gaskell's Fiction' 72.

contrasting perceptions of the landscape to emphasise the social and emotional incompatibility between Ruth and Bellingham although they both display a 'romantic' response to the land- and sky-scape. Whereas Ruth's perceives only positive qualities, Bellingham responds only negatively to his surroundings. The reality of the 'detestable' (*Ruth* 65) weather determines the enjoyment of his stay. The continuous rain curtails his activity and physically imprisons him within the inn, thus causing him to resent Ruth's evident enjoyment of such inclement atmospheric conditions.

> 'Really Ruth', he exclaimed one day, when they had been imprisoned by rain a whole morning, 'one would think you had never seen a shower of rain before; it quite wearies me to see you sitting there watching this detestable weather with such a placid countenance.' (*Ruth* 65)

Through their contrasting individual responses Gaskell links both protagonists inextricably to the environment, thus reinforcing the underpinning philosophy of the novel.

For both Ruth and Benson, on the other hand, the scenery is enhanced by the falling rain and for neither does it limit their enjoyment of the environment. On their first encounter, Ruth asks if he went out in the rain of the day before. He follows his affirmative reply with a qualification, 'Rain never hinders me from walking. Indeed it gives a new beauty to such a country as this' (*Ruth* 68). This sentiment is endorsed by Ruth for whom the 'rain was a pleasure' (*Ruth* 65). The contrast in their attitude highlights the fundamental differences between Ruth and Bellingham and it is partly via these contrasting perceptions of the aesthetic and physical characteristics of the landscape that Gaskell demonstrates the impossibility of a permanent relationship.

Bellingham's negative attitude to his surroundings extends to the inn itself. Having referred to its insufferable dirt on their arrival his negativity deepens after his illness. However, the place becomes 'abominable'(*Ruth* 88) partly because he is trapped by the consequences of his own decisions. He brought Ruth to Wales but under his mother's influence he felt burdened with the responsibility of her because of the social chasm between them.

Perceptions changed as well as differed. To emphasise the social and emotional gulf between the couple, Ruth's awareness of her socially unacceptable position is symbolised by her changing but highly romanticised perception of Llan-dhu. When she was loved by Bellingham, she thought her surroundings were 'enchanted into everlasting brightness and happiness' and that 'any woe could enter and be charmed because she was within the protection of the 'glorious guardian mountains'(*Ruth* 83). However, against the realism of the 'soft warm scented air and calm summer sky veiled with mist' (*Ruth* 82) during her night vigil at the height of Bellingham's illness, she became aware that despite the fact that the village was encircled by apparently everlasting mountains, no physical landscape can protect provide a barrier against the extremes of human emotion:

> The high dark outlines of the mountains [...] stood, like giants solemnly watching for the end of Earth and Time. She [...] thought the land enchanted into everlasting brightness and happiness; she fancied, then, that into a region so lovely no bale or woe could enter, but would be charmed away and disappear before the sight of the glorious guardian mountains. Now she knew the truth, that earth has no barrier which avails against agony.' (*Ruth* 83).

Gaskell dramatises the point as Ruth follows Bellingham after his selfish cowardice triumphs and he sneaks away from Llan-dhu. The drama is denoted by the sudden increase in narrative pace as Ruth in emotional and physical agony runs very fast in her attempt to catch him up: 'But Ruth was away before Mrs Morgan had finished her speech, out and away, scudding along the road, thought-lost in the breathless rapidity of her motion' (*Ruth* 93).

Throughout this dramatic scene, Gaskell romanticises the reality of the situation. The chambermaid indicates to Ruth the 'white Yspytty road'(*Ruth* 92) from an upstairs window. However, the seeming unending everlastingness of wave upon wave of mountains which girdle the village have become an illimitable barrier and physically prevent Ruth from reaching her lover. Ironically the mountains, by which Ruth felt protected, now guarded Bellingham against her attentions. From being part of the 'picturesque' landscape the mountains can be classed with the moorlands as

'wildscape'. All the time though, Ruth's sense of the environment is 'romantic' in that her emotions are symbolised constantly through the physical landscape so that there is an inextricable link between environment and the psychological status of the protagonist:

> If she could but gain the summit of that weary, everlasting hill, she believed that she could run again, and would soon be nigh upon the carriage [...]. Wave above wave of the ever-rising hills were gained, were crossed, and at last Ruth struggled up to the very top and stood on the bare table of moor, brown and purple, stretching far away until it was lost in the haze of the summer afternoon; and the white road was all flat before her, but the carriage she sought and the figure she sought had disappeared [...]. She threw herself down on the ling by the side of the road, in despair. Her only hope was to die, and she believed she was dying. (*Ruth* 93-94)[129]

For Gaskell moorlands as representatives of a 'wildscape' were associated with the end of the emotional spectrum.[130] However, even in emotional extremis, Ruth was aware of the microcosm of life which survived in the open unenclosed, treeless bleak Welsh moorland ecosystem:

> Long afterwards she remembered the exact motion of a bright green beetle busily meandering among the wild thyme near her, and she recalled the musical, balanced, wavering drop of a skylark into her nest near the heather-bed where she lay. (*Ruth* 94)

It is a moment highly reminiscent of the closing scene of *Wuthering Heights* and it indicates not only the enduring qualities of nature, but is also a symbol of hope. [131] The philosophy which underpins Gaskell's work is convincingly demonstrated in the Welsh episode of the novel as romanticism and 'deterministic realism'[132] of the physical landscape are intertwined and inextricably woven into the emotional lives and fates of her characters.

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[129] The Yspytty road does not cross the Moelwyns and the moorland plateau is encountered much further from Ffestiniog than Ruth's run suggests. Therefore, there is some creative recollection in this description although it is dramatically effective.

[130] For instance, it was to the vast expanse of open moorland behind Monkshaven, that Philip fled after his treachery towards Sylvia had been discovered.

[131] Emily Brontë writes, 'I lingered around them under that benign sky [...] watched the moths fluttering among the heath and hare-bells; listened to the soft wind breathing through the grass' (*WH* 338).

[132] Easson, introduction, *Ruth* xiii.

ABERMOUTH – The interface of 'steadfast' rocky foreshore and vast expanse of exposed sands.

The dramatic mountain scenery of North Wales with its sense of confinement and enclosure was an entirely appropriate environment for the relationship between Bellingham and Ruth to reach its climax. In her choice of Abermouth for their first encounter after six years was entirely different environmentally but equally appropriate. The open expanse of shore, the seascape and extensive skyscape symbolise freedom and space and can be classified as 'wildscape'. In this environment Ruth makes her own decisions and determines her own future, whereas in the confinement of the Welsh village she was at the mercy of the good and evil in others around her. However, like Llan-dhu, Abermouth is a place in which intense emotions are inextricably linked to the landscape, where Ruth has to confront the consequences of her actions and where, at the interface between land and sea, on the vast wastes of sand and mud flat, she is able to control her own destiny for the first time.[133]

Whereas North Wales had been the scenic location for only one novel prior to *Ruth,* Gaskell was the first novelist to draw upon North Lancashire as a fictional environment. Silverdale, a small coastal village on Morecambe Bay, was the inspiration for Abermouth. It comprised a sparse scattered population of fishermen and farmers with a handful of larger grander houses.[134] Like North Wales it had become a holiday destination for the middle-classes of Manchester for whom it was easily accessible after the building of the railway in 1847. Although new houses were built and old cottages renovated and extended, many regular visitors like the Gaskells rented existing property.[135] The Gaskell family had first gone to Silverdale

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[133] Gaskell develops the sea-land interface as a dramatic location more fully in *Sylvia's Lovers.*
[134] *Lancashire,* map Sheet 18 *Six inches to one mile.* (Southampton: Ordnance Map Office, 1848)
[135] Uglow, *A Habit of Stories* 146.

in 1843, and liked it so much that it became a place of almost 'annual pilgrimage'.[136] Initially they stayed at Gibraltar Farm, as it was then known. When it was booked, the alternative was Lindeth Tower located in the grounds of the farm, which had been built by Fleetwood in 1842.[137] Gaskell adored the Tower despite its cramped conditions. Her enthusiasm is evident in a letter to Charles Eliot Norton in 1858 in which she draws a plan of the house and tells of the awkward but quaint domestic arrangements (*Letters* 504). Passionate about the area and invariably sociable, Gaskell encouraged friends and family to join them during their summer sojourns in North Lancashire, so that, at times, Silverdale became a replica of Manchester's social whirl. Despite all the comings and goings of visitors, Gaskell found 'all the duties of life so easy & simple compared to those of a great large town' (*Letters* 513).

The Rhythms of sea-side life.

Placed within the Eccleston phase of the novel, the Abermouth visit is integrated into the narrative by the economic and political links between the two places that determine the movements of the characters. Bradshaw decides to rent Eagle's Crag, at great expense, so that his daughter can benefit from the restorative powers of the sea air. Their absence from Eccleston coincides with a general election, the circumstances of which provide the opportunity for Bradshaw to visit. The girls and Ruth arrive in Abermouth 'delighted with the new scenery' (*Ruth* 259) whilst the Bradshaw home is 'being rapidly adapted for electioneering hospitality' (*Ruth* 253). These are circumstances which are beyond Ruth's control but set in train a series of causal events which result in a meeting where destinies are determined, i.e. the crucial meeting between Ruth and Bellingham on Abermouth Sands.

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[136] Uglow, *A Habit of Stories,* 147. Uglow uses this term although Gaskell described it as an 'annual migration' to Lady Kay-Shuttleworth. *Letters* 119. They stayed in Silverdale almost every year starting in 1843 until the 1860's.

[137] David Peter, In *and Around Silverdale* (Silverdale: Barry Ayre, 1994) 20. Correspondence between Catherine Winkworth and Emily Shaen in 1852 indicate that they made references to the tower as 'The Fleetwoods. Catherine expresses a preference for it. Winkworth, *Letters and Memorials* vol. I 351-352.

Like Silverdale, Abermouth had only a post office, which appears as '*the shop*' (her italics) as an index of its low order status. In Silverdale the baker was six miles away and the butcher fifteen miles away, causing Gaskell to describe the village as 'a charming primitive desert' (*Letters* 511).[138] In this remote location Gaskell set great store by correspondence. She pleaded with Charles Eliot Norton '*to write to her there,*' because, 'it is a long hot walk to the post office and it is so disappointing to find no letters there when we get there.' (*Letters* 505)[139] In the Abermouth section of the novel, the simple daily rhythms of life are very similar. The collection of letters from the post office and the organisation of meal-times contribute to the narrative structure of this part of the novel as they control its pace and drive the narrative forward. Letters from Eccleston are crucial to the advancement of the story and Ruth's walk to 'the shop' in the little village about half a mile away where all the letters were kept till fetched is strongly reminiscent of Gaskell's own experience.[140] Letters in the novel inform of unexpected visits. A letter informed of Bradshaw's visit and a second letter is to Ruth from Bellingham as the story builds to the climactic defining moment when Ruth confronts her former lover on the sands to refuse his offer of money and acknowledgement of his illegitimate son.

These visits require adjustments to the daily routine. Meal-times have to be changed to fit in with the arrivals and departures of Bradshaw and his guests and such is the detail in which Gaskell tells the reader about the arrangements they seem almost autobiographical:

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[138] Encapsulated in the idea of 'desert' is the sense of a wilderness remote from familiar territory that summarises Gaskell's perception of Silverdale. Abermouth is portrayed as a 'low order' settlement with its single retail outlet, i.e. 'the shop'. The expression '*the shop*' is the one she used to describe Foster's shop in Monkshaven, although in that case the term denoted its superiority and centrality rather than its singularity.

[139] Emily Shaen expresses a similar perception of the remoteness when she writes to Catherine in the hot summer of 1852, 'They've gone clean *wud* about the elections here. Does anything of that kind penetrate into Silverdale?' Winkworth, *Letters and Memorials* vol. I 351. The comment about election links up to Gaskell's inspiration for the elections in the novel.

[140] The inspiration for all these apparently fictional, organisational and structural details can be found in a clutch of letters written to Charles Eliot Norton about her Silverdale sojourns. Jane Whitehill, ed. *Letters of Mrs Gaskell and Charles Eliot Norton 1855-1865* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1932) 19-29, 75-87.

> 'Your papa said they would be at the station at five o'clock'.
> 'And they are to dine at six?' asked Elizabeth.
> 'Yes', answered Ruth. 'And I think if we had our tea half an hour earlier, at half past four, and then went out for a walk, we should be nicely out of the way just during the bustle of the arrival and dinner.' (*Ruth* 266-267)[141]

When the visitors leave, breakfast is brought forward half an hour so the men could catch the train. Both these changes have great narrative significance for they provide the opportunity for dramatic and defining moments in the story. Ruth's carefully laid plans to be away from the house on the arrival of Bradshaw are sabotaged as he arrives to find that his meal is not ready. Therefore, accompanied by Donne and Hickson, he walks down to the sands in search of his daughters and their governess. At this unexpected meeting Ruth recognises her former lover whom she has not seen for six years. Then, in the slot of time after the early breakfast before he leaves, Bellingham discovers the secret of his son. This revelation raises the reader's expectation of an impending climax to this interlude because Bellingham drove away 'knowing he had seized the spell to make her listen at last' (*Ruth* 290).

Although the family had the use of a pony chaise by 1852 most of their holidays were spent in 'long exploring rambles' (*Ruth* 259).[142] In Abermouth, as in the rest of the novel, the narrative is driven forward by these daily perambulations which are either purposeful, like the walks to church or to meetings on the sands, or they are leisurely rambles like the ones that introduced Ruth and her charges to the area. Again Gaskell utilises her own experience of Silverdale. The family attended the local Anglican chapel-of-ease in the absence of an Unitarian place of worship, where they met friends like the Winkworths.[143] The church was about a mile from Lindeth and her familiarity with those walks are strategically used in the novel in a manner strongly reminiscent of *Mary Barton.* They provide Bellingham with the opportunity to make verbal

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[141] The familiarity which is conveyed in this interchange is reminiscent of the description of the Carson home in *Mary Barton.*

[142] Winkworth, *Letters and Memorials* vol. I 352.

[143] Uglow says in parenthesis that 'the Gaskells always went to the Anglican church on holiday if there was no chapel near'. Uglow 147. Winkworth, vol. I 69.

contact with Ruth, and they divert the girls away during Ruth's pre-arranged meeting with Bellingham on Abermouth sands.

The Geography of Abermouth and its literary significance.

Gaskell's familiarity with the area is nowhere better demonstrated than in the spatial layout of Abermouth which accords closely with the six-inch map of 1848 in terms of the landmarks described:[144]

> She was perhaps half a mile or more from the grey silvery rocks, which sloped away into brown moorland, interspersed with a field here and there of golden, waving corn. Behind were purple hills, with sharp clear outlines, touching the sky. A little on one side from where she stood, she saw the white cottages and houses which formed the village of Abermouth, scattered up and down, and, on a windy hill, about a mile inland, she saw the little grey church. (*Ruth* 295)

'Throughout its earlier history Silverdale consisted merely of an aggregation of scattered farmsteads, which were quite often widely separated.' Peter's description demonstrates how accurately Gaskell used the village as the inspiration for Abermouth.[145] Slightly less topographically secure is the location of the church which in the novel appears to be on 'top of a windy hill.' In fact it lies at the foot of King William's Hill.[146] The church lay precisely one mile from Lindeth Tower but slightly less than a mile 'inland' so on the whole her distances are correct. The country rock of hard, resistant limestone supports little more than pasture and moorland, especially on the higher ground of Heald Brow above Jenny Brown's Point at the southern end of Silverdale Bay and King William's Hill which is situated at the northern end.

Amongst the shallow rendzinas which are the typical soils found on limestone, there was a 'sizeable area of fertile soil'[147], the fields of which were used as arable land, so a small amount of 'waving corn' (*Ruth* 295) would have been visible from the sands.

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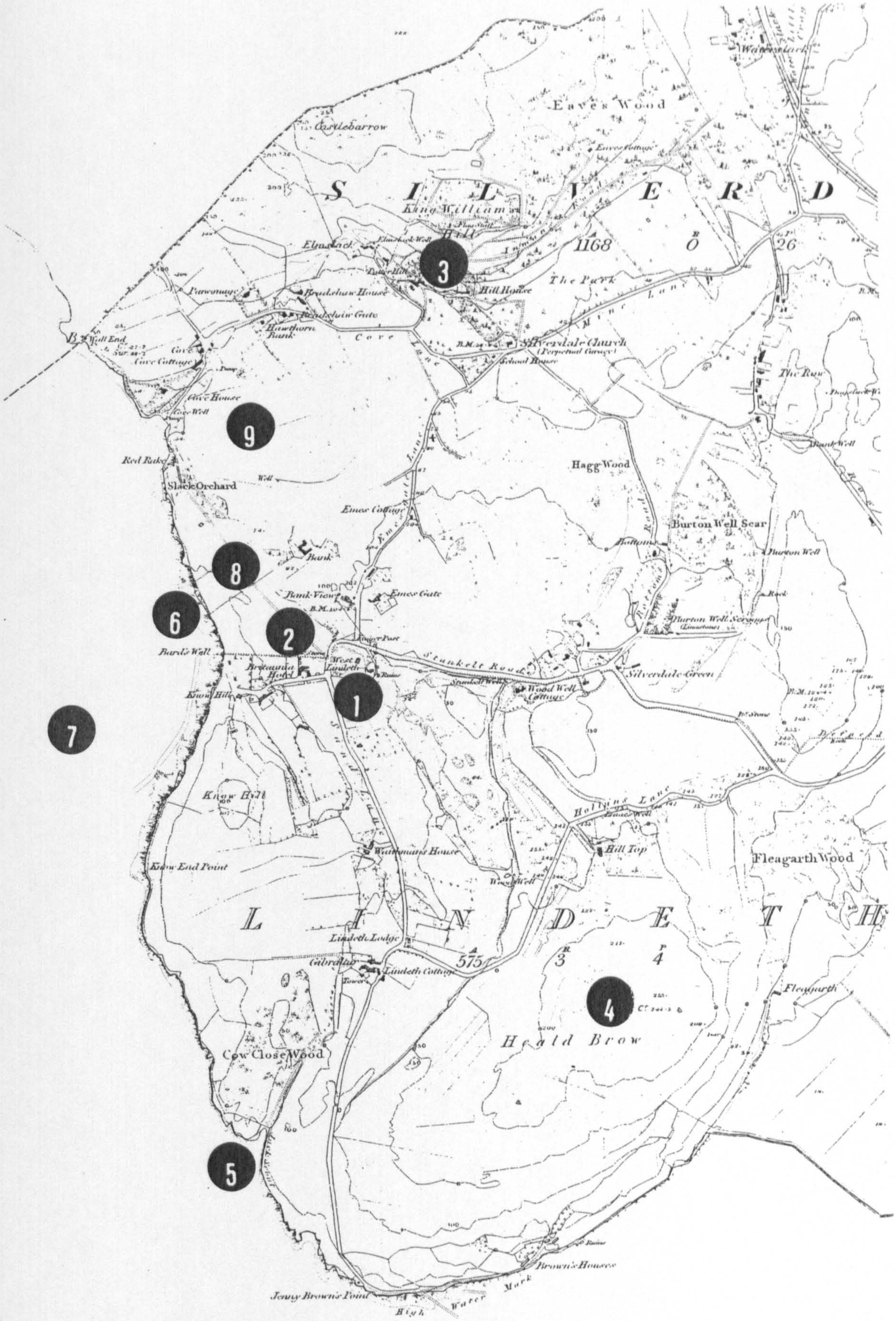
144 *Lancashire,* map 1848.

145 Peter 37.

146 Peter 57-58.

147 Peter makes it clear that this was the most fertile area as it lay in the valley on an old lake Peter 50-1.



1. Lindeth Tower, Gibraltar Farm-the Gaskell's rented holiday home for many years. 'It was a long way to the Post Office.'
2. *Abermouth*- 'scattered up and down.'
3. 'On a windy hill, a little grey church.'
4. 'Brown moorland'
5. 'Cow's Mouth'- the old drove road
6. The 'grey silvery rocks' of the foreshore
7. The wide shifting estuarine sands of the littoral zone
8. 'Fields of golden waving corn.'
9. Cove House- part of the inspiration for *Eagle's Crag*

Fig. 3.4 Silverdale, 1848 -the inspiration for Abermouth

Source: *Lancashire,* map Sheet 18 Six inches to one mile (Southampton: Ordnance Map Office, 1848)

'The purple hills which rose behind' (*Ruth* 295) are the distant hills of the Cumbrian Mountains in the Lake District. Considering she was writing hurriedly and from memory her evocation of the Abermouth area is a faithful and unmistakable replica of Silverdale.

However once Gaskell introduces houses and characters into the landscape, her spatial awareness becomes less precise and topographical amalgamation appears to take over. For instance, it is difficult from the information given to be certain of the spot out on the sands from which Gaskell describes the scene, despite the fact that the reader knows Ruth is half a mile from the shore. There are two reasons for this. First, Eagle's Crag, which stands on the rocky foreshore, was probably inspired by two houses, according to Uglow, who is certain that Gaskell combined Lindeth Tower and The Cove,[148] one of the other large houses on the northern part of the bay. If this was the case there seems to be two possible perspectives. If Ruth had run down 'Cows Mouth'- the inlet at the Lindeth end of Silverdale-out on to the sands[149], then her perspective from this point would have rendered the church invisible. Alternatively, if she had used the path down from 'The Cove' at the northern end of the village, she might have been able to see the church despite its slope-foot location and lack of tower or spire. However, as Gaskell gives no directions, Ruth could have been standing anywhere along the coastal sands half a mile out looking back at the landscape. By testing these alternatives against reality it is possible to conclude that Gaskell replicated a good deal of the physical landscape but when it came to pinpointing houses and Ruth's position on the sands, Gaskell reverts to the process of topographical amalgamation and re-creation.

If the topography replicates rather than resembles, the geomorphology and geology of the area help to reinforce its identity. Morecambe Bay is a large, wide, relatively

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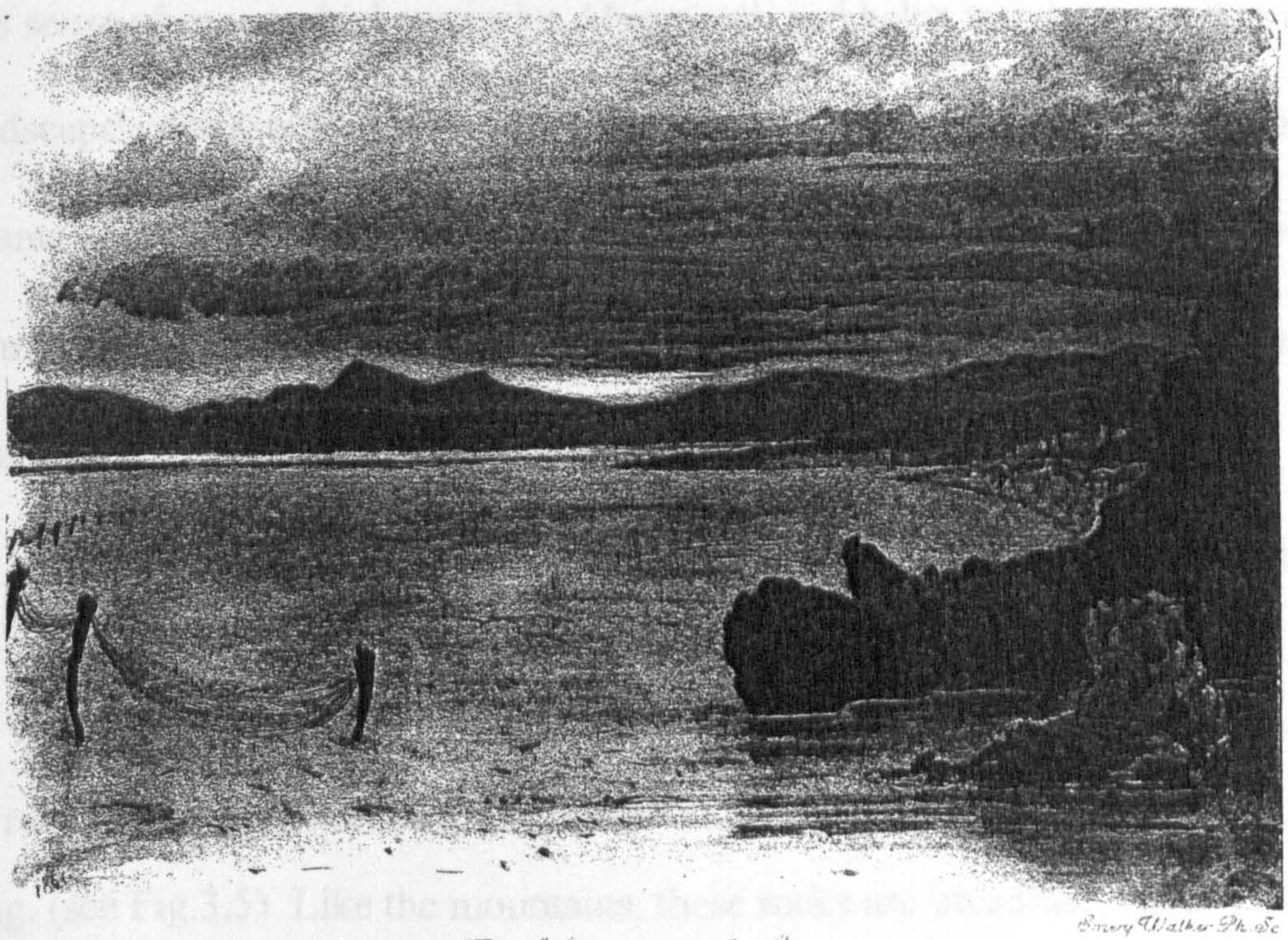
[148] Uglow 302. Uglow is following in the tradition established by most commentators, notably Sharps, Easson and Shelston, that locations were often a combination of 'observation and invention'.

[149] Cow's Mouth is an old drove road used by cattle drovers taking their animals across the Kent estuary. Peter 13.

when describing Silverdale, as 'a little dale running down to Morecambe Bay with grey limestone rocks on all sides, which in the sun or moonlight, glisten like silver', (*Letters* 119) her fictional portrayal of the rock focuses upon its chameleon-like qualities. Fundamentally grey or white, rain and bright sunshine endow it with a unique shiny, 'silvery' appearance, a realistic perception reinforced by Emma Winkworth, years later: 'It has been a bright breezy afternoon wet sands after high tide, rolling clouds on the Lake Hills and the near view in changing shade and sunshine, the latter make those grey rocks look quite silvery.'[155]



The "Abermouth" Sands
From a water colour drawing by M.G. (1861)

Fig. 3.5 The Abermouth Sands
From a water colour drawing by M.G. 1861.
Source: Elizabeth Gaskell, *Ruth* ed. A.W.Ward vol. III (London: John Murray, 1906) frontispiece

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155 Winkworth and Shaen, vol. II 541.

It has been argued in these pages that Gaskell's familiarity with the area informs the narrative because she used the experiences of long summers in the spot to provide narrative structure. However, like all the other places which inspire *Ruth,* the realism of Abermouth's physical environment possesses a veneer of symbolism. This is derived not from the reality of the place but from what Gaskell saw as the essence of Silverdale.[156] She wrote to Charles Eliot Norton after her visit to Rome in 1858 to say:

> One is never disappointed in coming back to Silverdale. The secret is I think, in *the expanse of view* (my italics), –something like what gives its charm to the Campagna-such wide plains of golden sands with purple hill shadows,–or fainter wandering filmy cloud shadows & the great dome of sky. (*Letters* 514)

This sense of space which pervades Abermouth and helps to categorise it as a 'wildscape' contrasts markedly with the sense of protection and enclosure which the mountains afforded at Llan-dhu. It must have been inspired by the real perspective from the uppermost room in Lindeth Tower which has its fictional re-creation as the view from the rooms at Eagle's Crag:

> They saw the great storms gather on the sea horizon, and put themselves in marching array; and soon the march became a sweep and the great dome of the heavens was covered with the lurid clouds [...] and by and by the house was wrapped in sheets of rain shutting out sky and sea and inland view. (*Ruth* 259)

On rocky 'sure' foundations of limestone on the margins of the land stands Eagle's Crag. (see Fig.3.5) Like the mountains, these rocks are 'steadfast', (*Ruth* 269) part of the 'everlasting' landscape (*Ruth* 83) and the fixed point in Ruth's uncertain world as she encounters Bellingham for the first time since his hasty departure from Wales. The subtle use of contrasting solid rock and shifting sands with their biblical overtones is part of the sustained imagery of the novel and is entirely appropriate to

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156 Although the essence of the place is a view rather than a 'feeling' as it was in the case of Wales, places always elicit an emotional response from Gaskell.

the theme of Ruth's spiritual and moral growth. This is convincing proof that the novel is underpinned by the interweaving of romanticism with realism.

Whilst familiarity with an estuarine environment enabled Gaskell to produce the realistic topography which informs this episode in Abermouth, it is the romantic sense of space which inspired her to locate two of the defining moments in Ruth's life in the littoral zone between land and sea. On the first meeting Ruth's intense emotional response is signified by her surroundings. Notoriously unstable, unvegetated sand and mud-flats when exposed at low tide fail to support the weight of a human being.[157] Recognition of Bellingham comes only as he attempts to engage her in conversation. His voice is unmistakable and, as he speaks, she ceases to have an existence separate from the sands. In reply to Bellingham's question about whether she enjoyed the sea-side, she:

> Breathed [...] 'Yes' [...] in deep inspiration rather than spoken in a sound. The sands heaved and trembled beneath Ruth. The figures near her vanished into strange nothingness; the sounds of their voices were as distant sounds in a dream [...] . She could have caught at his arm for support in the awful dizziness which wrapped her up, body and soul [...] . She dared not look round to see the figure of him who spoke, dark as it was. She knew he was there-she heard him speak in the manner in which he used to address strangers years ago; [...] It seemed as if weights were tied to her feet- as if the steadfast rocks receded-as if time stood still; -it was so long, so terrible, that path, across the reeling sand (*Ruth* 268-9)

On the second pre-arranged occasion it is Ruth who chooses the location of the meeting out by the distinctive black posts which hold the fishermen's nets.[158] (See fig

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[157] H. Collins, *Lancashire Plain and Seaboard* (London: Dent and Sons, 1953) 167-168. See also Uglow 147. Gaskell used these shifting sands as the basis for her short story, *The Sexton's Hero,* in which the quick-sands and the tide of the Kent estuary determine the fate of the characters.

[158] Gérin, like most biographers and literary critics mention the black posts because of their unique place on this shoreline. She suggests that they provide indisputable evidence that Gaskell was inspired by Silverdale in this part of the novel. Gérin 136. However few commentators explain the role of these nets. Local historian, David Peter sheds some light on their function. **Staked Nets:** 'These consisted of long nets staked at each end which were so arranged that fish were trapped therein as the tide ebbed. At low tide the fishermen collected any fish thus caught. These were mainly flat fish, and in particular, flounders.' Peter 30. Stephen Bromley, whom Ruth uses as protection against any threat by Bellingham as they met is just such a fisherman and he is coming across the sands at low tide to collect his fish. Gaskell must have been acutely aware of this economic activity when she stayed in Silverdale.

3.5). These are a tangible touch of reality in an otherwise featureless shorescape. Whilst her familiarity with the economic activity of the area help to locate the spot precisely, this time the sands rather than being realistic are 'hard and echoing' as Gaskell uses this image to symbolise Ruth's resolve to determine her own destiny as well as that of Leonard. To Gaskell, these open spaces represent freedom of choice and the unenclosed nature of the exposed sands has echoes of the common land in Cheshire where Ruth had the opportunity to determine her own destiny. However, as the author demonstrated, her upbringing, youth and naivety failed to allow Ruth to follow the possible escape route from Bellingham. Six years later her experiences in the loving, spiritual Christian home in Eccleston have enabled her to put her faith in God and, in the absence of love for Bellingham and for Leonard's sake, she spoke her mind. Bellingham entreats her 'to think once more':

> 'I think once more;' she spoke solemnly. ' To save Leonard from the shame and agony of knowing my disgrace, I would lie down and die. Oh! perhaps it would be best for him-for me, if I might; my death would be a stingless grief-but to go back into sin would be the real cruelty to him. The errors of my youth may be washed away by my tears-it was so once when the gentle, blessed Christ was upon earth; but now, if I went into wilful guilt, as you would have me, how could I teach Leonard God's holy will? I should not mind his knowing my past sin, compared to the awful corruption it would be if he knew me living now, as you would have me, lost to all fear of God'-Her speech was broken by sobs. 'Whatever may be my doom-God is just-I leave myself in His hands. I will save Leonard from evil. Evil would it be for him if I lived with you.'(*Ruth* 301)

What strikes Shelston about these scenes is the close connection between Ruth's psychological state and the evocation of the landscape.[159] (The same connection has been shown to be true of Welsh mountain and moor). Her final harsh words, unmistakable in their intent, also provide symbolic links back to the biblical imagery of the shifting sands and sure rocky foundations of Eagle's Crag. Ruth and Bellingham finally walk apart back to the shore and in the same way that Ruth rested in the rocky field as she returned from her first encounter with Bellingham on the

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[159] Shelston, '*Ruth*: Mrs Gaskell's Neglected Novel' 188.

sands, she 'sank down behind a great overhanging rock' (*Ruth* 304) to rest. On both occasions, having reached the stability of the land, the narrative pauses to allow Ruth to take stock. The 'low watery twilight' of the first occasion merely highlighted her 'pale haggard wild'(*Ruth* 269) appearance whereas having determined her own destiny found her cares and sorrows 'swallowed up in the unconscious sense of God's infinity' when she looked at the 'gorgeous' (*Ruth* 305) sunset in the illimitable expanse of landscape and skyscape before her. At this point the reader is reminded of the scene in Wales when Ruth realised that the confines of mountains could not 'avail against agony'(*Ruth* 83). Gaskell is weaving the contrasting landscapes into the narrative structure by using them to demonstrate Ruth's emotional and moral growth.

The wildscapes of mountain and shore are intensely realistic and equally intensely 'romantic' as they reflect Ruth's changing emotions as events unfold. Mountain joins moor to become 'wildscape' in response to Bellingham's desertion. Whilst the Welsh wildscape reflects her desperation, they also mark the beginning of a change to self-determination so that by the time she is exposed to Bellingham's entreaties on the sandy wilderness at Abermouth she is in control of her own destiny. In Abermouth however, whilst the landscape is heavily 'romanticised' and interwoven into the narrative it does not determine destiny in the way that the rocky hillside of Llan-dhu prevents Ruth from an irrevocable act.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the novel, Gaskell has relied on familiarity with two contrasting townscapes and two diverse landscapes which have wild' elements within them to inspire her fictional locations. Whether she replicates or resembles, amalgamates or manipulates, realises or romanticises and, as has been argued, she is inclined to do all of these, the topography is far from vague. As has been discussed these realised land- and town-scapes with their romantic overtones interact to form the foundations of *Ruth*. The successful adaptation of Moretti's model shown in Fig, 3.6 makes this clear.

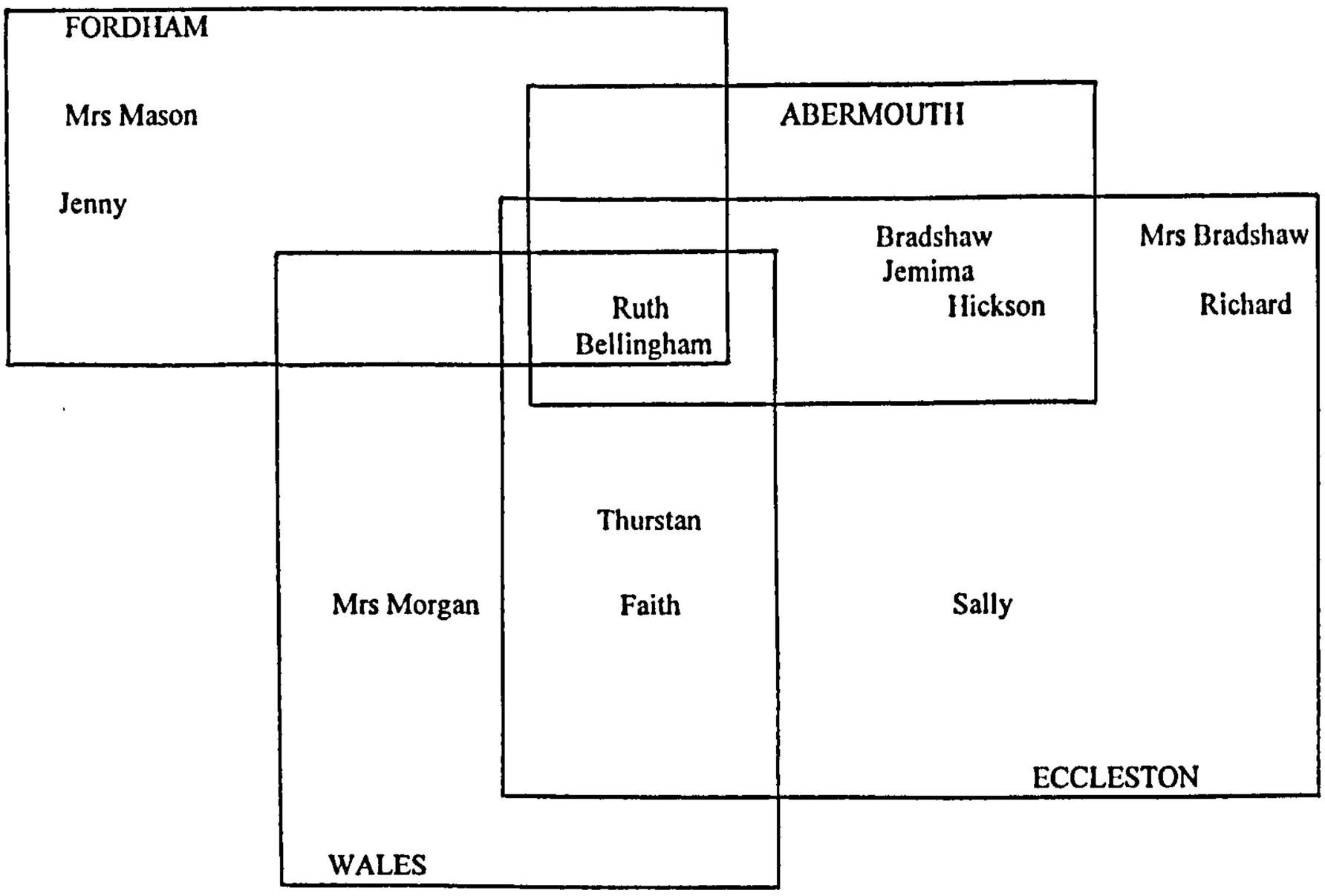

Fig.3.6 The Narrative Structure of *Ruth*

That the four locations appear in differing proportions of the narrative does not indicate a positive correlation between length of their appearance and dramatic significance.[160] Eccleston accounts for 50% of the narrative by chapter whereas Abermouth, ironically, appears in only two and half out of thirty six chapters (7%) despite the fact it is the location where the novel reaches its dramatic climax as Ruth takes control of her own destiny. Wales, however, accounts for 25% of the narrative which 'in terms of the mechanics of the plot [...] takes up far more room than is necessary' according to Shelston.[161]

Character movement both within and between locations controlled the spatial interconnections and narrative dynamics of Gaskell's first novel. Walking is a significant activity in *Ruth*, one that moves the narrative forward and controls its pace

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[160]The diagram is not drawn to scale so that the places are not shown accurately in proportion to their appearance in the text.

[161] Shelston, '*Ruth*: Mrs Gaskell's Neglected Novel' 184-5.

within the four locations.[162] However the control of the between-place movements is more varied. A highly symbolic narrative gap exists between Fordham and North Wales and only the couple's arrival in the region is recorded. Such authorial control is repeated when Ruth and the Bradshaws go to Abermouth whereas significantly the narrative follows Ruth as she leaves the unhappiness associated with the Welsh mountains behind to begins a new stage of her life. Therefore although essentially a linear narrative there is a little more authorial control over these narrative dynamics than was the case in *Mary Barton.*

The plot of *Ruth* is initiated on a chance encounter between Ruth and Bellingham, although the annual hunt-ball, at which they met, was an annual occasion determined by the traditions and rhythms of life in the town. Their relationship, which is the substance of the plot, is enacted mostly within natural 'wildscapes'. Although wildscapes comprise less than half the narrative, they are dramatically, realistically and symbolically significant as Ruth's relationship blossoms, fades, dies and fails to be resurrected within the illimitability of mountain, moor and shore. The couple's movement from one environment to the next and their walks within those places takes the narrative forward through the dynamics of the relationship, demonstrating the close links between human beings and their environment. This philosophy underpins the action in other ways too. It has become clear during the course of argument that there are subtle nuances and differences in the way Gaskell uses these environments to demonstrate the character-environment link. For instance, intimate knowledge of local geology creates a dramatic turning point and, it has been argued, is a determinant of destiny whereas the illimitable sands at Abermouth whilst realistic do not determine destiny but represent Ruth's mental state and self-determination. The physical geography of Abermouth sands determines the action only in so far as the tidal regime dictates time and place of meetings between Ruth and Bellingham, the first of which was by chance. Another point of interest is the changing perception of

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[162] The dramatic significance of the walks in Ruth would be a worthy subject for a paper.

the mountain landscape in North Wales. Initially, Ruth regarded them as 'beautiful' and guardians against unhappiness, a perception which was rapidly changed by Bellingham's departure. They became a metaphorical 'wildscape' as Ruth crosses what has become an illimitable barrier of both mountain and moor to catch up with her lover. It seems possible to draw the conclusion then that together, the mountain and moorlands of North Wales, although 'picturesque', oft visited and quite different in landscape quality from the moorlands of Yorkshire which feature in the following chapter, can be viewed as 'wildscape' even if they are as much representative as realistic.

Eccleston which accounts for half the novel is a physically enclosed environment in which the themes of 'independence, self-determination' and expiation are resolved.[163] To some extent however, the physical and socio-economic conditions of this industrial environment have to be considered a determinant of Ruth's ultimate fate as typhus fever was an inevitable consequence of such an environment at the time.

There is much about Eccleston which is 'northern' from non-spatial indices like Sally's apparel and the local dialect to the physical index of industrialisation, that is typhus fever.

Finally, although this novel is geographically widespread and topographically diverse, Gaskell's underpinning philosophy unifies the whole as character is linked to environment constantly in a variety of ways throughout the text.

Shelston opines that the narrative lingers longer in Wales than the story warrants.[164] Perhaps this is because she enjoyed writing about the perceived reality of a 'wildscape' that was much loved.

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[163] Shelston, '*Ruth:* Mrs Gaskell's Neglected Novel' 184-5.

[164] Shelston '*Ruth*: Mrs Gaskell's Neglected Novel' 184-5.

CHAPTER 4

THE LIFE OF CHARLOTTE BRONTË

INTRODUCTION

Elizabeth Gaskell is unique amongst biographers of Charlotte Brontë for she is the only one who visited Haworth during Charlotte's lifetime; therefore she was in the privileged position of observing her subject within the environment which had played a formative role in her life. Out of loyalty to her 'dear friend' about whose life she was keen to keep a record (*Letters* 348) as soon as she heard of Charlotte's death, Gaskell collected and collated hundreds of Charlotte Brontë's letters and then selected judiciously to provide a chronological account of her life. The narrative drive of the biography is generated by Gaskell's omniscient narration as she links the letters together. However, as a friend and contemporary Gaskell could not remain objective, so these narrative links shape Charlotte Brontë's life story by offering opinions, judgements, and observations. This subjective narration means that the biography must be analysed in the light of a number of influential factors. First, Gaskell's preconceptions of Haworth forged before she visited for the first time; secondly, her own perceptual filter which is a function of her childhood in the enclosed well-wooded intimacy of the Cheshire countryside and her later life in industrial Manchester; and finally, Charlotte's perceptions, feelings and possible manipulation of Gaskell's knowledge and experience of Haworth. All three factors, it will be argued, have played a part in influencing the picture of the life presented to the reader. Readers of biography might reasonably expect the book to begin with its subject; most biographies do.[1] This is not so in *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*. Not only are its first two chapters occupied with the physical and human geography of Haworth and its locality, but the first chapter ironically ends in death as Gaskell contemplates the gravestone inscriptions of the deceased members of the Brontë family including

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[1]It is beyond the scope of this work to analyse the beginnings of all biographies but a random check amongst both Victorian and recently published biographies suggests that the vast majority begin either with the subject or the subject's family heritage.

Charlotte.[2] No reasons, commentary nor justification are given for this original and rather quirky approach until the opening of the second chapter when Gaskell makes it clear that in her opinion, 'for a right understanding of her dear friend' (*The Life* 15), it was essential that the reader knew something of the environment in which Charlotte had lived. Much later in the biography Gaskell admitted that 'she understood her life the better for seeing the place where it had been spent' (*The Life* 440). From the outset then, by portraying the place and its people, Gaskell intended that the reader should appreciate the deterministic underpinning of Charlotte's life, a philosophy which she espoused throughout her life and writing and one endorsed by Charlotte herself.[3] The 1850 edition of *Wuthering Heights* was prefaced by Charlotte with the following commentary,

> It (the novel) is moorish, and wild, and knotty as the root of heath. Nor was it natural that it should be otherwise; the author being herself a native and nursling of the moors. Doubtless, had her lot been cast in a town, her writings, if she had written at all, would have possessed another character. [4]

Charlotte's deterministic view expressed therein coincides closely with Gaskell's philosophy so as to convince the writer that a spatial beginning to her biography was not only appropriate but would have met with Charlotte's full approval.[5] This might be less true of May Sinclair's rather more didactic method of expressing her strong conviction that the environment determined their writings. Like Gaskell she is one of the few biographers to commence her biography, *The Three Brontës,* with place rather than character. However, Sinclair lacks the subtlety of Gaskell's geographical

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[2] Muriel Easter, 'Writing the life of a friend: Mrs Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë,*' Gaskell Society Meeting, Francis Holland School, London, 7 Nov. 1998.

[3] Before Gaskell even visited Haworth she had formed the opinion that the environment was a formative factor Charlotte's life and character. This preconception can be found in letters written to friends during the early 1850's prior to the 1853 visit. For instance, she writes to Charlotte Froude in August 1850. 'Her faults are the faults of the very particular circumstances in which she has been placed' *Letters* 128, and to Tottie Fox two years later, 'one only felt how lonely and out of the world she must be' *Letters* 219.

[4] Charlotte Brontë, 'Editor's Preface to the New Edition of *Wuthering Heights,*' Appendix 1, Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights,* ed. Hilda Marsden and Ian Jack (Oxford: Clarendon,1976) 442.

[5] 'For both Elizabeth and Charlotte the narrative of place is inseparable from the study of character.' John Chapple, 'A Sense of Place:Elizabeth Gaskell and Charlotte Brontë,' *Brontë Society Transactions* 20 (1992): 325. Chapple recognises the deterministic underpinning of their work.

description and begins with the provocative statement: 'It is impossible to write of the three Brontës and forget the place they lived in.' She continues with a long description of the place, which owes much to Janet Kay-Shuttleworth's perception of their home in that it stresses 'the black-grey, naked village, bristling like a rampart on the clean edge of the moor' (*Letters* 124), then the didacticism re-emerges as she writes: 'It is the genius of the Brontës that made their place immortal; but it is the soul of the place that made their genius what it is. You cannot exaggerate its importance.'[6] (perhaps Sinclair did!)

There are many literary critics who might argue vehemently against this point of view. For instance, Virginia Woolf eschews Sinclair's dogmatic environmental determinism to take a more ambivalent position. She comments that Gaskell's *Life:*

> gives you the impression that Haworth and the Brontës are somehow inextricably mixed. Haworth expresses the Brontës; the Brontës express Haworth; they fit like a snail to its shell. How far surroundings radically affect people's minds, it is not for me to ask: superficially, the influence is great, but it is worth asking if the famous parsonage had been placed in a London slum, the dens of Whitechapel would not have had the same result as the lonely Yorkshire moors.[7]

Whilst Adam Hopkins, a contemporary writer and journalist, implies that the topographical accuracy in the Brontë novels does not match that of *Lorna Doone*, he clearly endorses a deterministic philosophy when he identifies what he describes as 'an umbilical cord between the novels themselves and the moors.'[8] On the other hand, Marxist critics, those who politicise their readings by gender, and structuralists and deconstructionists are unlikely to recognise, or consider significant, the deterministic

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[6] May Sinclair *The Three Brontës* (London: Hutchinson, 1912) 7.

[7] Virginia Woolf, *'Haworth, November 1904'* Andrew McNeillie, ed., *The Essays of Virginia Woolf* vol. 1 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1986) 5

[8] Adam Hopkins *The Moorlands of England* (St Albans: Verulam, 1995) 107-8. In post-war period both Marsden and Flintoff have produced seminal works on 'Brontë geography.' Marsden has written three major articles about the moorland environment and the topography of *Wuthering Heights.* This latter work has been built on by Flintoff and others whose maps have added to this small but significant canon of research. Hilda Marsden, 'The North of England in the novels of the Brontë's' diss., Birkbeck coll., London U, 1967; 'The scenic background of *Wuthering Heights,' Brontë Society Transactions* 13 (1957); 'The Moorlands: The Timeless Contemporary,' *Brontë Society Transactions* 20 (1990; 20 (1991). Everard Flintoff, 'The Geography of *Wuthering Heights,' Durham University Journal* 77-78 (1984-5).

element which underpins *The Life of Charlotte Brontë.* Gaskell, however, subtly avoids commentary, she simply provides a picture of Haworth painted by means of her particular narrative method, which is less obviously subjective than that of May Sinclair.

Having been commissioned by Patrick Brontë to write the official biography of his daughter, Gaskell undertook a prodigious amount of research, including visits to all the places with which Charlotte had been familiar throughout her life. She wrote to Ellen Nussey in July 1856, a year after Charlotte's death: 'In fact I now think I have been everywhere where she ever lived, except of course her two little pieces of private governess-ship (*Letters* 394). Given the underpinning deterministic philosophy of the biography this emphasis on place in Gaskell's research is understandable. However, in the biography, the portrait of Haworth and its surroundings is informed both by the narrator's and the subject's perception of the place, as the selected word counts demonstrate.[9] Therefore, it is necessary to identify and collate both Gaskell's preconceptions and her initial first hand impressions of Haworth in order to appreciate the influences which operated to produce the portrait presented to the reader.

GASKELL'S FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF HAWORTH

Although she must have gained a strong sense of the moorlands, economy and society of the West Riding of Yorkshire from the Brontë fiction published by 1850,[10] there is little documented evidence about her response to their novels apart from one or two comments in her letters which reveal a reservation about them.[11] Collated from the impressions which appear in the letters she wrote on Sunday 25 Aug.1850,

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[9] See Appendix II 440-443.

[10] By 1850, *Jane Eyre* (1847), *Wuthering Heights* (1847), *Agnes Grey* (1847), *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) and *Shirley* (1849) had been published.

[11] For instance, she writes of *Jane Eyre* that: 'it is an uncommon book. I don't know if I like it or dislike it' *Letters* 57. She praises the 'wonderful opening of *Wuthering Heights'* but does not appear to like it as much as other novels by the sisters *Letters* 494. Of *Shirley* she writes: 'I think I told you that I disliked a good deal of the plot in *Shirley,* but the expression of her own thoughts in it so true and brave that I greatly admire her' *Letters* 116.

immediately following her first meeting with Charlotte at Briery Close,[12] an abiding image of Haworth can be identified. It was a life of

> extreme intense solitude [...] in a village of a few grey stone houses perched up on the north side of a bleak moor- looking over sweeps of bleak moors. Their parsonage facing the North-no flowers or shrub or tree can grow in the plot of ground on acct of the biting winds.' (*Letters* 124;128)

The quotation, extracted from letters to Catherine Winkworth and Charlotte Froude written immediately after her return from the Lake District, summarise what was for Gaskell, the *essence* of Charlotte Brontë's life and home environment. The passage highlights the features which made the greatest impression, i.e. the 'solitude', 'grey' building 'stone', 'north facing bleak sweeping moorland' and the lack of flowering plants in what ironically masquerades as a garden. This was Gaskell's preconception of Charlotte's home environment.

The image was initiated by Janet Kay-Shuttleworth who, having visited Haworth in March 1850, was able to provide Gaskell with a detailed description of the site of the village and appearance of the parsonage. The image of the 'grey square stone cold dead coloured house' also fixed itself in the mind of Catherine Winkworth's sister Emily, who read Gaskell's letter.[13] According to Charlotte's biographer, Lyndall Gordon, 'in the interstices of their stay' in the Lake District, Charlotte also imparted impressions of her home life to Gaskell.[14] Charlotte's contribution to the picture appears to come in the form of an impressionistic view of the wider landscape that emphasised the solitude of her home:

> Briery Close was situated high above Low-wood, and of course commanded an extensive view and wide horizon. I was struck by Miss Brontë's careful examination of the shape of the clouds, and the signs of the heavens, in which she read , as from a book, what the coming weather would be. I told her that saw she must have a view equal in extent at her own home. She said that I was

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[12] Briery Close, near Windermere in the Lake District, was the rented holiday home of Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth and his wife, Janet.

[13] Emily wrote to Catherine on 30 Aug. 1850 explaining that she could not get 'the look of the grey, square, cold, dead-coloured house of her head'. T.J.Wise and J.A.Symington, *The Brontës: Their Lives, Friendships and Correspondence* vol. III (Oxford: Shakespeare Head Press, 1932) 151.

[14] Lyndall Gordon *Charlotte Brontë: A Passionate Life* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1994) 322.

> right, but that the character of the prospect from Haworth was very different; that I had no idea what a companion the sky became to anyone living in solitude-more than the moors themselves. (*Letters* 127)

The 'extreme intense solitude' of the life in Haworth was a preconception perpetrated by Charlotte whenever she wrote about their life (*The Life* 353). After their meeting in the Lake District, Charlotte's public face was very much to the fore as a new edition of *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey* was published in December 1850. Included in the edition were 17 of Emily's poems. All the works were prefaced by Charlotte and her *Prefatory Note to the Selection of Poems by Ellis Bell* is full of adjectives which pile up to provide an undeniable image of remote, wild, dreary bleakness. They live in an '*old* parsonage-house', in a '*remote* English village' which has an '*obscure* village church' lying in the '*desolate* Yorkshire hills', covered with '*wild*' moors. 'It is a drear prospect'.[15] (My italics) As well as emphasising their secluded life which is mentioned three times, the memoir also contains a description of the landscape:

> Her (Emily's) previous life, [...] had been passed in the absolute retirement of a village parsonage, amongst the hills bordering Yorkshire and Lancashire. The scenery of the hills is not grand—it is not romantic; it is scarcely striking. Long low moors, dark with heath, shut in little valleys, where a stream waters, here and there, a fringe of stunted copse. Mills and scattered cottages chase romance from these valleys; it is only higher up, deep in amongst the ridges of the moors that Imagination can find rest for the sole of her foot: and even if she finds it there, she must be a solitude-loving raven—no gentle dove.[16]

There is a sharp contrast between this well observed description of her home with its topographical emphasis and Charlotte's response to the sublimity, romanticism and grandeur of the Lake District mountain-scape. In this latter environment, Charlotte wished she could have 'gone away by herself in amongst those grand hills and sweet

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[15] Gordon makes the salient point that Brontë wrote the prefaces soon after the death of Emily and Anne whom she was mourning in the solitude of the parsonage. Gordon 224-225. Therefore the image she creates may be exaggeratedly gloomy in these circumstances. Gaskell uses these words as part of her own narration of the environment without attribute emphasising how much she wanted to depict the landscape as Charlotte portrayed it to the world at large (*The Life* 172).

[16] Charlotte Brontë, 'Extract from the Prefatory Note to "Selections from Poems by Ellis Bell,"' Appendix 1, Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights,* ed. Hilda Marsden and Ian Jack (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976) 445.

dales' so that 'she could drink in the full power of this glorious scenery' (*The Life* 354). Charlotte's response to contrasting environments must have remained uppermost in Gaskell's mind because, in the biography, she juxtaposes her own preconception of Haworth against Charlotte's response to the mountains of the Lake District (*The Life* 353-4). Familiar to most readers, the Cumbrian mountains would have provided a useful and appropriate yardstick against which to compare the lesser known West Riding moorland landscape. Therefore it would seem that Charlotte's perception of her home environment which is so vividly portrayed in the prefaces to the works of her sisters played a significant role in informing Gaskell's biography.

A few months earlier, in 1850, prior to their first meeting, the subject of Charlotte Brontë had arisen in correspondence between Gaskell and Janet Kay-Shuttleworth, for Charlotte had visited their 'grey antique, castellated and stately home' of Gawthorpe, in return for their visit to Haworth.[17] In a letter Gaskell wrote to Janet Kay-Shuttleworth in May 1850, she refers to another source of information about the Brontë family and Haworth. She writes: 'Soon after I saw you at Capesthorne I heard such a nice account of her, (Charlotte Brontë) from a gentleman who went over to see her father & staid at the inn, where he was told of her doings as well as her sayings & writings' (*Letters* 116). The gentleman to whom the letter refers can be identified as the Rev John Curtis, who was headmaster of the Lower Mosley Street Schools from 1836. These schools were the teaching arm of Cross Street Chapel, so that both William and Elizabeth would have known him well. It seems natural, that having been to Haworth, he would have imparted something of his experiences to them, although Gaskell is not specific about detail.[18]

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[17] R.J.W.Selleck, *James Kay-Shuttleworth: Journey of an Outsider* (Ilford: The Woburn Press, 1994) 269

[18] Mr Curtis appears to have accompanied another clergyman to Haworth who is identified by Charlotte as the Rev- Vicar of Bierley. Charlotte mentions Mr Curtis in a letter as 'Mr C-' although it seems that John Curtis may not have visited the parsonage as his companion did. Clement Shorter, *The Brontës: Life and Letters* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1993) 115. Interestingly Barker identifies Curtis' companion as the Rev Andrew Cassels, 'who talked in a loud and vulgar key' but she makes no mention of John Curtis. Juliet Barker, *The Brontës* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1994) 628.

Amalgamating all the evidence from the time of the publication of the first Brontë novel in 1847, to the end of 1850, it is clear that Gaskell had the seeds of a strong vivid image of Haworth as a 'wild out of the way place' (*Letters* 128) and Charlotte's 'perfectly secluded life' was firmly planted in her consciousness.[19] However, the image was to lie dormant until she visited Haworth three years later, although there must have been brief rekindlings when Charlotte visited Manchester and through their correspondence during that intervening period.

Plans for Gaskell's visit to Haworth had been made for June 1853 but owing to 'a severe attack of influenza', (*The Life* 436) Charlotte could not receive her friend so the visit was delayed until September. Towards the beginning of that month Charlotte wrote to Gaskell suggesting that she should not delay too long for the heather was in bloom and she had taken this as a signal of the impending visit. She warned that after 16 August the heather would fade 'and grow sere.'[20] This precise description of the short flowering season substantiates the picture Charlotte painted in *The Prefatory Note to the Poems* in which she writes of the 'flower-flush of August on the heather.'[21]

Earlier, in June, Charlotte had written far more whimsically of Haworth creating a picture of pioneering frontier territory:

> When you take your leave of the domestic circle and turn your back on Plymouth Grove to come to Haworth, you must do it in the spirit which might sustain you in case you were setting out on a brief trip to the backwoods of America. Leaving behind your husband, children, and civilisation, you must come out to barbarism, loneliness and liberty. [22]

Knowing that Charlotte and Gaskell discussed Harriet Beecher Stowe when the latter visited Haworth it seems likely that perhaps Charlotte had in mind the recently published *Uncle Tom's Cabin* when she used the image of the 'backwoods of America' to describe Haworth. At the same time however, it matched her own perception of her

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[19] Charlotte Brontë, 'Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell,' Appendix 1, Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights,* ed. Hilda Marsden and Ian Jack (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976) 440.

[20] Wise and Symington, vol. IV 83.

[21] Charlotte Brontë, 'Prefatory Note' 445.

[22] Wise and Symington, vol. IV 70. This letter is reproduced in the biography, *The Life* 435. This is a perfect indication of Gaskell's intentions to portray Haworth through Charlotte's eyes.

home environment and must have created a strong physical and visual image in Gaskell's mind already full of images of wild bleakness and desolation.

Charlotte's comment may have been nearer the truth than she realised, for although Gaskell had been into the North Riding of Yorkshire from Silverdale in the summer of 1852,[23] she was not at all familiar with the West Riding. Also despite being well-travelled, her experience of extensive featureless moorlands would have been limited to what she could see from the square of carriage windows when travelling from Knutsford across the Pennines to Newcastle and across the moorland plateau of North Wales.[24] She would also have seen moorlands on her weekend visits to Rivington near Burnley where the Dukinfield Darbishire's second home was located.[25] The Lancashire moorland is less extensive and the topography is dissected by beautiful wooded valleys known locally as 'cloughs'.[26] The moorlands of North Wales are essentially different because they are part of a 'picturesque' mountain landscape whereas there is nothing but moorland around Haworth. To all intents and purposes then, the endless sweeps of the moorland landscape of Haworth must have been unfamiliar and consequently alien to Gaskell when she visited in 1853.[27] Her preconceived image can be summarised in the following sentence. Gaskell expected to meet a writer whose life of 'extreme solitude' was spent in 'an old parsonage situated in a remote village built of grey stone houses sited on a north facing slope embedded in an extensive moorland landscape'.[28] Charlotte superimposed on this image a sense that something of a pioneering spirit was essential and that there was a

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[23] This visit had included 'The Three Peaks' and Bolton Abbey. There is a vivid account of this three day break in Susanna Winkworth, ed. *Letters and Memorials of Catherine Winkworth* vol.1 (Clifton: E. Austin, 1883) 355-358.

[24] Endorsement for this suggestion can be found within the biography. Charlotte makes a similar observation about views of the Lake District. 'Decidedly I find it does not agree with me to prosecute the search of the picturesque in a carriage. A wagon, a spring-cart, even a post-chaise might do; but the carriage upsets everything.' *The Life* 355.

[25] Gaskell visited Newcastle during the winter of 1829-30 and then again in the winter of 1830-1. Chapple, *The Early Years* 343-344. She went regularly to Rivington. 'Oh Rivington is such a very pretty place and so thoroughly country.' *Letters* 19.

[26] These deeply incised valleys are the result of erosion by glacial meltwater.

[27] Marsden, 'The Moorlands' 30. Marsden equates the ideas of unfamiliarity with alienation.

[28] This quotation is my amalgamation of all Gaskell's impressions of Haworth prior to her first visit.

sense of urgency about Gaskell's visit so that she could see the moorlands in all their blooming glory.

Although Gaskell collected hundreds of letters and made two visits to Haworth in the course of her research for the biography,[29] her knowledge and experience of Haworth when Charlotte was still alive amounted to one single visit of three days' duration. A record of the visit can be found in the two detailed letters written immediately afterwards about which Uglow comments that it was almost as if the experiences of the visit 'were knowingly recorded for posterity.'[30] In fact extracts from the letter to Catherine Winkworth are quoted extensively in the biography together with a letter from Jane Forster probably written to her family at Fox How in the Lake District which recounts a journey she and her husband made to Haworth.[31] Jane Forster's account strongly echoes Gaskell's experience and reactions (*The Life* 362-365). These letters appear to cover similar material and Gaskell is aware that she is 'at risk of repeating something which she has previously said' in order 'to impress and re-impress' upon the reader what she wants them to know of Charlotte's life (*The Life* 438). She draws heavily on her first impressions of Haworth to begin her biography.

THE BEGINNING OF THE BIOGRAPHY

Judging that her readers, like her, would be unfamiliar with Haworth, its environs and population, Gaskell devoted the first two chapters of her biography to a documentary and informative account of the physical and human geography of the area.[32] However, to highlight what it *'felt'* like to approach Haworth for the first time, she 'used her

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[29] 19 Sep. 1853 to see Haworth for the first time; 23 July 1855 with Catherine Winkworth; 24 July 1856 with Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth.

[30] Uglow 393

[31] This letter is quoted without attribute in the biography and placed chronologically in 1850, *The Life* 362-363. Careful research uncovered the source of the letter and confirmation has been provided very kindly by Margaret Smith. The writer was identified as Jane Forster by her niece Mrs Humphry Ward, in the latter's *A Writer's Recollections* (London: Collins, 1918) 38. The letter may not have been to Mrs Gaskell who says she 'is permitted to give extracts' from it, but to Jane's family, the Arnolds at Fox How (*The Life* 363). Smith says that she has 'assigned a tentative date, which I may well revise, of fairly late January 1851.' Letter to the author. n.d. I am very grateful to Margaret Smith for her help.

[32] The running headlines of the first two chapters of Easson's edition are *all* place-specific.

novelist's skill to create atmosphere, setting and character.'[33] There are two manifestations of her literary skill in the first chapter. By implication, Gaskell requests the reader to accompany her as she travels from the railhead at Keighley along the road to Haworth,[34] thus initiating the narrative momentum. Then throughout the journey she seeks to enlighten and create a sense of place for the uninitiated reader by close observation of the landscape. Having arrived at its destination, the narrative pauses to contemplate the gravestone inscriptions of the deceased subject and members of her family.

The documentary narrative continues in Chapter II with an exposition of the human geography of the 'peculiar forms of population and society amidst which her (Charlotte's) earliest years were passed' (*The Life* 15). As the narrative proceeds Charlotte's letters appear increasingly frequently as she becomes older and embarks upon her prodigious correspondence.

At the beginning of Chapter III the reader may have cause to wonder whether the first two chapters can stand alone. There is an abrupt shift from environment to drama as the third chapter begins with what might be considered a conventional opening for a biography; that of the subject's family. 'The Rev Patrick Brontë is a native of the County Down in Ireland. His father Hugh Brontë, was left an orphan at an early age. He came south to the north of the island [...]' (*The Life* 34). As well as adding authenticity to her narrative by giving precedence to place, the first two chapters subtly demonstrate the underpinning philosophy of environmental determinism and although they appear almost separate, they are indispensable to the work.

The Regional Context

This lack of familiarity shared with her readers may be the reason that the first sentence of the biography sets Haworth in its regional context. 'The Leeds and

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[33] Uglow 407. Hilda Marsden confirms that 'this tract of marshland and heather clad waste between Keighley and Halifax was barely known outside the confines of the area'. Marsden, 'The Moorlands' 28.

[34] A similar invitation was extended to the reader at the beginning of *Mary Barton.*

Skipton Railway runs along a deep valley of the Aire; a slow and sluggish stream, compared to the neighbouring river of Wharfe' (*The Life* 9).[35] Immediately, readers immediately have some sense that Haworth is located within the Leeds area.[36] This town, together with Bradford, was the commercial focus of the West Riding woollen industry at the time, and the fact that she mentions the railway signals that the area has infrastructure which makes it accessible. The village of Haworth lies on the north- facing spur between a tributary of the River Aire, the river Worth and one of its tributaries, the Bridgehouse Beck, so mention of the Aire sets the village in a specific regional geographical context. However, just in case the reader has never heard of the River Aire or remains vague about the precise location of the area, Gaskell compares the River Aire with the River Wharfe. This is a deliberate strategy, for it is likely that middle class cultured literary readers would make the association between the 'picturesque' Upper Wharfe valley, immortalised by Wordsworth.[37] It was also one of Howitt's 'Remarkable Places',[38] a volume published in 1840 to which Gaskell contributed an essay on Clopton Hall early in her writing career. Gaskell had visited the area in 1842 [39] and Charlotte had been there ten years earlier in 1833,[40] therefore

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[35] The first sentence of the first edition reads 'Leeds and Bradford Railway' which was the name of the railway company until 1846. Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë,* ed. Alan Shelston (London: Penguin, 1975) 53. This version concurs with the manuscript. The change was made to the second edition (which is followed by the third edition) during a frenetic period of revision. Invaluable help from Angus Easson suggests that the reason for the change was geographical. The inclusion of Skipton indicates to the reader that the train goes 'through Keighley, otherwise people might be puzzled knowing that Bradford was before Keighley.' Angus Easson, letter to the author, 9 Nov. 1999. The sequence of stations along line could have dictated the amendment. This theory fits into the discussion of Gaskell's approach to geographical accuracy and topographical security. It seems clear that at the beginning of her biography she wanted readers to be aware of where in the north this rather unknown village was located, and it seems that Gaskell thought she was correcting the text. I am grateful to Angus Easson for engaging in epistolary dialogue about this matter.

[36] Marsden describes the geography of the area in detail, 'As the nineteenth century progressed, the system of canals and railways constructed as auxiliaries to rivers and roads through the Aire and Calder gaps in order to facilitate trade only served to isolate the moorland further'. She mentions that this area of the West Riding east of Halifax was growing rapidly and there is mention of Bradford as one of the main centres of trade. Marsden, 'The Moorlands' 29-30.

[37] William Wordsworth, *The White Doe of Rylstone,* William Wordsworth, *The Poems,* ed. John O. Hayden vol. I (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977) 741-797.

[38] William Howitt, *Visits to Remarkable Places* 2nd ed. , (London, 1840) 197-231.

[39] Although the main part of the excursion in 1852 had been spent in and around 'The Three Peaks', see footnote 23, Gaskell had visited the village of Addingham in the lower Wharfe valley. There is

it was an appropriate context for her subject. The landscape of the Upper Wharfe valley possessed all the qualities admired by the 'Romantics' so that mention of the River Wharfe would have provided a recognisable landmark within the regional context.[41] However, Gaskell's direct comparison of the two rivers is geomorphologically spurious because the upper Wharfe at Bolton is a natural fast flowing river, deeply incised into its solid geology whereas the Aire, canalised in 1853, is 'slow and sluggish' due to consequent artificial control of discharge.

Keighley.

Having provided a regional context for Haworth, Gaskell turns her attention to the urban environment of Keighley. It had become accessible due to the opening of the railway in 1847; a point Gaskell makes in the first sentence. Until the railway arrived, Keighley must have been something of a northern frontier town, largely unknown and unvisited. Although in the letter written after her first visit, Keighley makes a brief appearance as a 'rising wool manufacturing town' (*The Life* 438; *Letters* 247), Gaskell builds up a more detailed picture in the biography by highlighting how the concomitants of industrialisation changed Keighley's townscape during the 1850's. Rapid population growth and the processes of urban change are signalled in the demolition of the old, and replacement by new, architecture, street layout and land use. At this time central land use was becoming increasingly commercial as the residents moved out into the surrounding rural areas, which although on a smaller scale in Keighley, was a process typical of Manchester.[42] Woven into this changing picture is Gaskell's visual and aural unfamiliarity with the town. 'The solid grandeur

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evidence for this in the biography, for she describes an incident that she and William experienced in Addingham, 'a village not many miles from Haworth' (*The Life* 19).

[40]There is an excellent account of this excursion from Ellen Nussey's *Reminiscences* in Barbara Whitehead, *Charlotte Brontë and her 'dearest Nell': The Story of a Friendship'* (Otley: Smith Settle, 1993) 56-7. Charlotte drew Bolton Abbey during her visit. See Christine Alexander and Jane Sellars, *The Art of the Brontës* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 228.

[41] The upper Wharfe around Bolton Abbey has incised itself into its bed and flows rapidly and turbulently through a gorge section known as 'The Strid'.

[42] See page 50 in the thesis. High land values due to the accessibility to transport and other infrastructure resulted in high land values in the central business districts with the consequence that residents could command high prices and move out profitably.

of the houses' is stately rather than picturesque and the 'grey building stone which abounds' is alien to a resident of Manchester accustomed to the warm red local brick of that town.[43] The local accents, distinctive in their hard discordant tones, are unfamiliar to her ear and the names 'have a particular smack and flavour of the place':

> In fact, nothing can be more opposed than the state of society, the modes of thinking, the standards of reference on all points of morality, manners and even politics and religion in such a new manufacturing place as Keighley in the north and any stately sleepy picturesque cathedral town in the south. (*The Life* 9)

Gaskell highlights the fact that it is not only the sight of the physical landscape but non-spatial indices like dialect that makes the place unfamiliar. At the same time the town becomes identifiably 'northern'. Gaskell deliberately uses the comparison of a sleepy cathedral town in the south because she is aware that a large proportion of her readership would be more familiar with those places than with the newly dynamic, rapidly developing, northern towns which were a relatively recent phenomenon of the British landscape. Thus she provides another familiar landmark as a yardstick for comparison. The topographical accuracy of the portrait of Keighley is undeniable but, woven into it, is the notion that it is a **northern** frontier town beyond which the landscape becomes 'wilder and wilder' (*The Life* 363).

The Road to Haworth

Haworth lies four miles south-west of the sights and sounds of this markedly northern, industrial town along a paved road which was the recognised and popular route for visitors to the village. A survey of *Early Visitors to Haworth* (1833-61) who appear in Charles Lemon's volume, 50% of them trace their journey to Haworth along this particular route as an integral part of their account of the visit.[44] Like them, Gaskell followed the conventional route, so that her perspective was similar to that of

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[43] I acknowledge that Barker recognised this fact. Barker 739. However as a Mancunian by birth and familiar with Haworth my comment originated from personal experience rather than a documentary source.

[44] Charles Lemon, ed. *Early Visitors to Haworth: From Ellen Nussey to Virginia Woolf* (Haworth: The Bronte Society, 1996)

many other contemporary visitors. On first visit she took a 'car'[45] from Keighley to Haworth, whereas the second time, accompanied by Catherine Winkworth, they walked the four miles presumably because it was a 'broiling hot July day' (*Letters* 364)[46] Walking the route would have provided Gaskell with a heightened awareness of the roadside features and landscape between the two places. If the 'car' was a closed vehicle, the view would have been circumscribed by the square of window and the olfactory sensations slightly masked by the physical barrier created by the vehicle. Wrapped up against the inclement weather in buffalo skin and unable to raise one's head against the wind and rain would certainly curtail the view. This was the situation when Jane Forster and her husband travelled to Haworth and may well have been the case on the 'dull, drizzly day' (*The Life* 438) of Gaskell's first visit if she had travelled in an open vehicle. However, both of Gaskell's journeys would have provided her with the necessary experience, knowledge and confidence to guide the reader along the route at the opening of the biography. 'The first chapter in which Elizabeth Gaskell leads her reader from Keighley to Haworth offers an *authentic geographical area that can be plotted on a map and "followed in the field"*.' (my italics)[47] Keith's words used of *Lorna Doone* have been paraphrased to demonstrate their applicability to *The Life.* Whilst careful study of a contemporary six inch map of the area demonstrates that the route described by Gaskell is realistic and topographically

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[45] Evidence from other Gaskell sources suggest that she might have had in mind a closed vehicle. Ruth and Bellingham arrive at Llan-dhu in a 'Welsh car drawn by two horses with undrawn leathern curtains.' *Ruth* 62. William and Elizabeth have the use of a car during their honeymoon in the same part of the world. John Chapple, 'The Gaskell Honeymoon' *Gaskell Society Newsletter* 9 (1990): 6. A guidebook records that 'every respectable inn possesses its 'inside' cars which were designed to accommodate three or four persons, with a small quantity of luggage'. C.F. Cliffe, *The Book of North Wales* (London, 1851) 8. All in all, the evidence does not seem conclusive. In her letters Charlotte describes the difficulties of travelling to Haworth from Keighley but is non-specific about the nature of the vehicles. Wise and Symington, vol. III, 70. Marsden, 'The Moorlands' 30. Oddly enough Gaskell makes no reference to practical difficulties associated with the accessibility of Haworth.

[46] Interestingly Gaskell perceived the distance as 'a long four miles' perhaps because it felt a long way on a hot July day and/or because the route was unfamiliar *The Life* 98.

[47] 'From the third chapter, in which John Fry and the young John Ridd ride from Tiverton to Oare via Dulverton and the track skirting Dunkery Beacon, we are offered an authentic geographical area that can be plotted on a map and readily followed "in the field".' W.J.Keith, *Regions of the Imagination* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1988) 80.

accurate, it is important to remember that Gaskell came to the area as a stranger and, as Gould and White comment, 'our views of the world and people and places in it are formed from a highly filtered set of impressions and our images are strongly affected by the information we receive through our filters.'[48] Gaskell's perception of Haworth was the result of a number of different but interactive and interconnecting filters. First was the childhood filter of familiarity and deep love of the enclosed intimacy of a fertile agricultural region. Secondly, as Uglow reminds her readers, Gaskell is first and foremost an imaginative writer.[49] Thirdly, she travelled to Haworth with a fairly fixed image of the place derived from Janet Kay-Shuttleworth, Charlotte, and the Brontë novels. Therefore her map and portrait of the route is filtered by her preconceptions, perceptions, and modified by her professional skills as a novelist so that the reality is blurred or distorted and embellished with subtle imagery and symbolism.

Her preconceptions of Haworth led her to expect a rural environment. Instead she encountered urban sprawl as 'the town of Keighley never quite melts into country on the road to Haworth'(*The Life* 10):

> The distance is about four miles; and, as I have said, what with villas, great worsted factories, rows of working men's houses, with here and there an old-fashioned farm-house and outbuildings, it can hardly be called 'country' any part of the way. (*The Life* 10)

The description of the residential and industrial land use which straggles along the valley bottom and lines the sides of the road depicts a land use pattern which was rapidly developing as part of the process of industrialisation. Factories were located in the valley bottom for water supply and ease of access as the workers' cottages customarily were cheek-by-jowl with the factories so that the 'hands' could walk to work. This linear pattern of industry meant that contrary to her expectations, Haworth

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[48] Peter Gould and Rodney White, *Mental Maps* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974) 48. See 323.
[49] Uglow 407.

was not remote from Keighley.[50] (See Fig 4.1) It is also clear from the implication of the final sentence that Gaskell was aware that: (a) the industry is clearly superimposed on the more traditional agricultural land use of the area and, (b) that she was moving through a rapidly changing landscape.

Accustomed to vividly coloured countryside consisting of a variety of greens and other bright colours typical of Cheshire, Gaskell's expectations were confounded as she travelled along to Haworth:

> In a town one does not look for vivid colouring; [...] but in the country some brilliancy and vividness seems to be instinctively expected and there is consequently a slight feeling of disappointment at the grey neutral tint of every object, [...] on the way from Keighley to Haworth.(*The Life* 10)

Grey tones dominate this landscape and are derived from a number of sources. Cloudy skies; weathered Millstone Grit which becomes grey with age; the grey-green tones of the dormant heather, and the atmospheric pollution which produces a pall of smoke over Keighley and the lower Worth valley.

Gaskell highlights the changes of land use in relation to geology, soils and relief along the route of the road, highlighting the changes that occur along the route. As the altitude increases, soil depth and fertility decrease and the land is more exposed so that trees decline at the expense of lower growing shrubs and coarse grasses. The arable land consists of 'hungry looking grey-green oats', (*The Life* 11) a hardy crop used principally for fodder. Gaskell recognises the upper limit of cultivation and highlights the treelessness of the landscape without being too explicit about it:

> The soil in the valley is rich; but as the road begins to ascend, the vegetation becomes poorer; it does not flourish, it merely exists; and, instead of trees, there are only bushes and shrubs about the dwellings. Stone dykes are everywhere used in place of hedges; and what crops there are, on the patches of arable land, consist of pale, hungry-looking, grey-green oats. (*The Life* 10-11)

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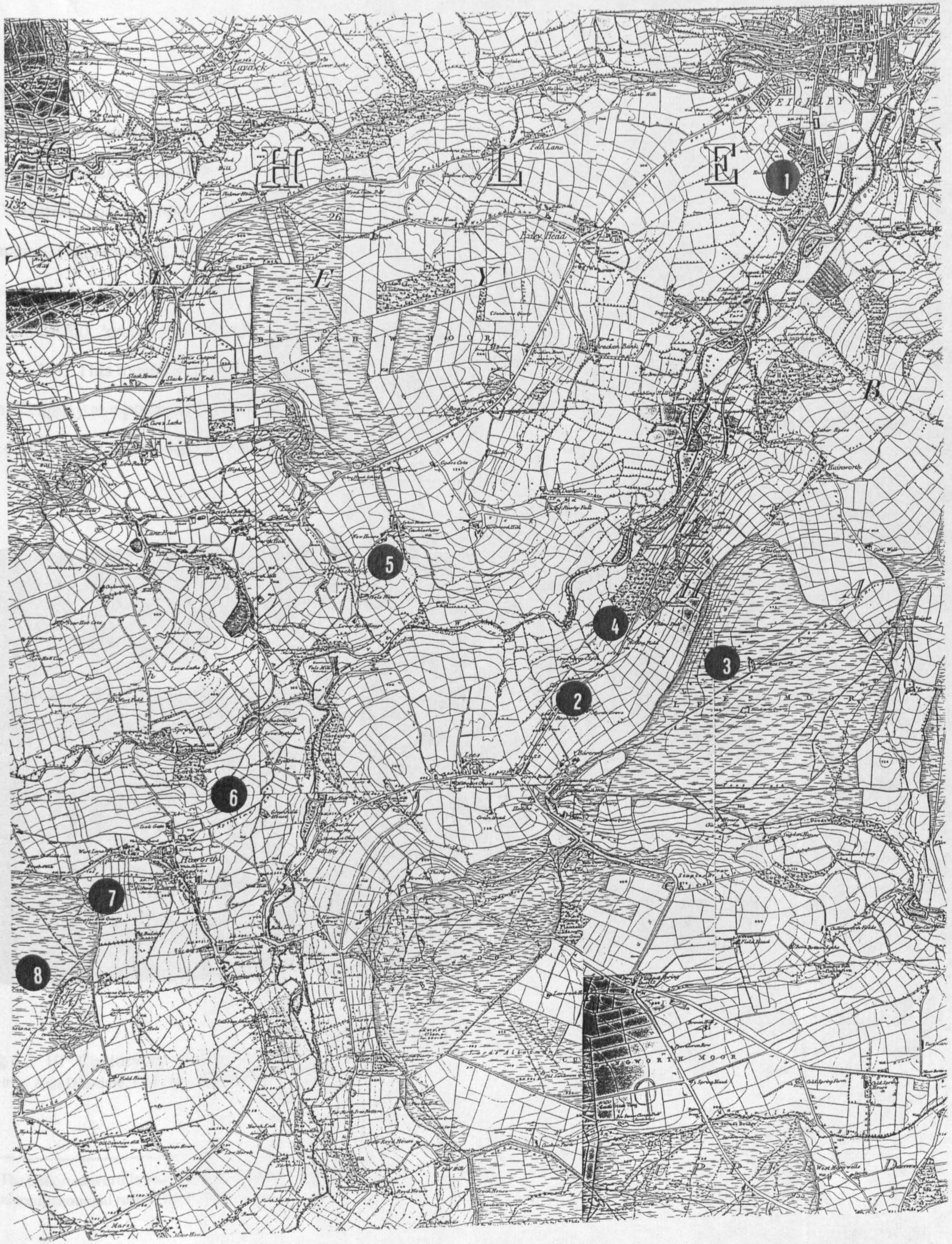
[50] Charlotte had made it quite clear in her potted biography of her sisters that they lived in a 'remote district.' Charlotte Brontë, 'Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell,' Appendix I, Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights,* ed. Hilda Marsden and Ian Jack (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976) 435.



1. The urban sprawl of Keighley
2. The first sighting of Haworth
3. 'Old' road (*The Life* 233-234)
4. 'New' road (*The Life* 233-234)
5. Robin Longbottom's proposed route to Keighley
6. Mytholmes Lane route to Keighley
7. Routes to the moors from the Parsonage
8. The Moors - 'All around the horizon there is the same line of sinuous wave-like hills'

Fig. 4.1 The Road from Keighley to Haworth
Source: *Yorkshire,* map Six inches to one mile 1st edition (Southampton: Ordnance Map Office, 1851)

This initial account eschews her more emotive epistolary approach quoted within the biography (*The Life* 438) which succinctly and vividly summarises her response to the unfamiliar landscape; 'some fences everywhere, trees nowhere'. The treelessness of the Yorkshire landscape was one of its most notable features for the sense of alienation it imparted.[51]

The reader sees Haworth two miles before he reaches the village due to its elevated position of 700', 'on the side of a pretty steep hill [...] embedded in the moors' (*The Life* 11; 23). This means that Gaskell could see Haworth half way along the road from Keighley at a point just before she reached the small settlement of Bocking.(See Fig.4.1) Fig. 4.2 illustrates a similar view taken from Haworth Brow.

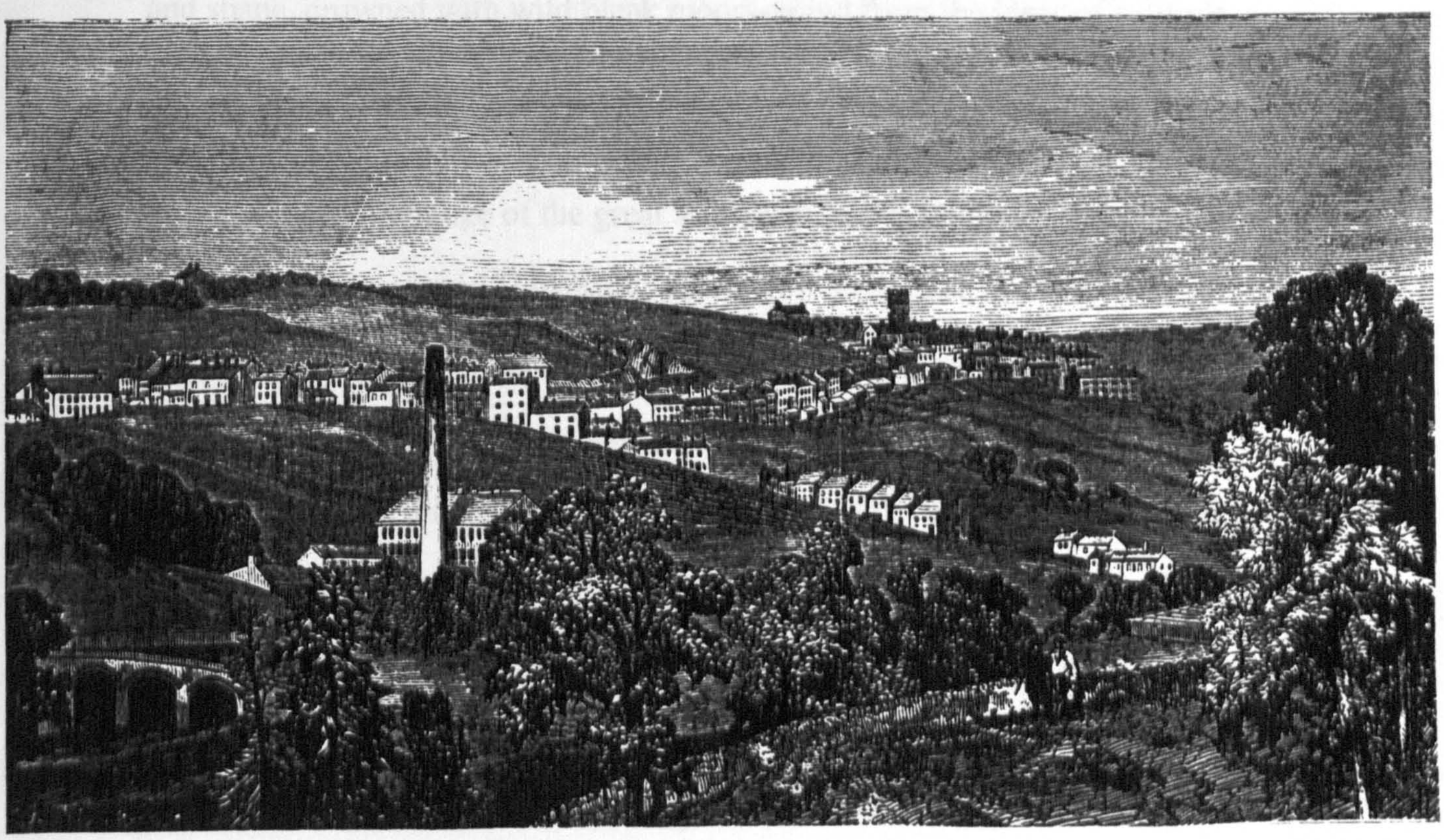


Fig 4.2 19th Century view of Haworth from the South-East
Source: Ann Dinsdale, *Old Haworth* (Keighley: Hendon, 1999)

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[51] The italicised word is one Gaskell used about North Wales and encapsulates the fact that landscapes produced emotional responses in Gaskell.

Easson has observed that, at this point in the narrative, the moorlands dominate the landscape.[52] The viewer cannot escape them, a sensation Gaskell retained from her first visit. In the letter to Catherine Winkworth, she writes: 'The road winding between the wave-like hills that rose and fell on every side of the horizon with a long illimitable sinuous look'(*The Life* 438). In the biography this image is embellished and developed but does not attain the hyperbolic heights of some of the authorial interventions which occur in her fiction. Here Gaskell recognises the constraints of the genre whilst conveying so vividly perceptual responses to the landscape of Haworth:

> All around the horizon there is this same line of sinuous wave-like hills; the scoops into which they fall only revealing other hills beyond, of similar colour and shape, crowned with wild bleak moors-grand from the ideas of solitude and loneliness which they suggest, or oppressive from the feeling which they give of being pent-up by some monotonous and illimitable barrier, according to the mood of mind in which the spectator may be. (*The Life* 11)

Janet Kay-Shuttleworth's image of the great sweeps of bleak moorland impressed upon Gaskell before she visited Haworth is now given expression as Gaskell wishes to convey to the reader that Haworth is 'embedded' in a landscape which possesses a never-ending quality in which there is also a sense of alienation and unfamiliarity. The spatial expression of this feeling lies in the illimitability of the horizon, and its superficial expression lies in the dry-stone walls which were so alien to a Cheshire girl accustomed to the hedgerows and trees which delimit fields in that part of the world.[53] Nevertheless, despite her own feelings Gaskell demonstrates her awareness of perceptual filters and accepts that the qualities of this landscape are open to interpretation.

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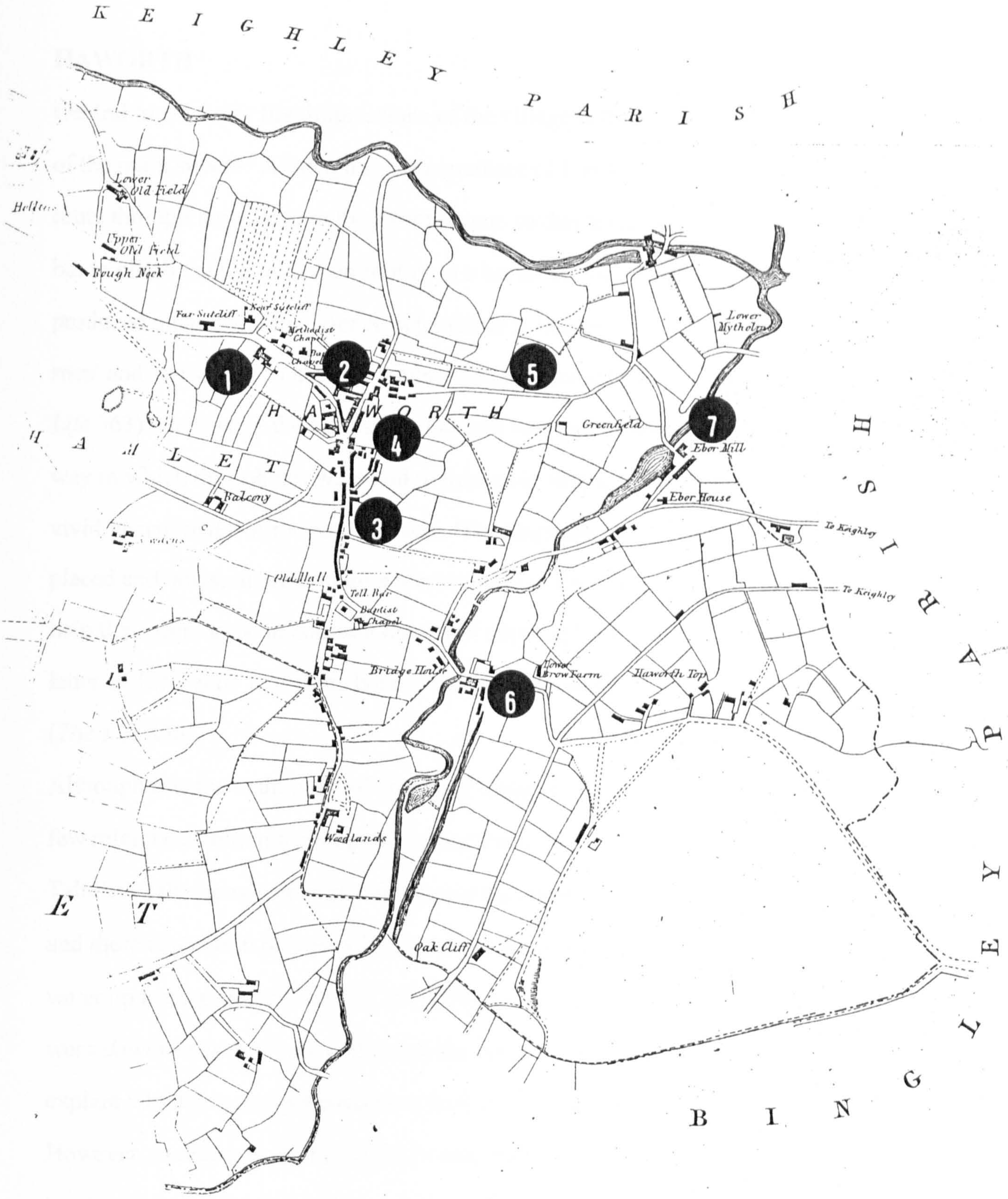
[52]Angus Easson, *Elizabeth Gaskell* (London: Routledge, 1973) 152

[53] The last section of this chapter will consider the portrait of the moorlands in some detail.



1.	Parsonage	**4.**	Gauger's Croft – overcrowded, insanitary and poor
2.	Triangle of people and poverty – 'higgeldy –piggeldy cottages, built around cobbled yards and reached by narrow alleys and ginnels'	**5.**	Route to Keighley via Mytholmes Lane
		6.	Mills in the valley bottom - 'Vast complex of Bridgehouse mills' (Barker 94)
3.	Main Street – linear morphology	**7.**	Ebor Mill

Fig.4.3 The Site and Morphology of Haworth

Source: Benjamin Babbage, *Report to the General Board of Health* (London: HMSO, 1850)

HAWORTH

Central to Gaskell's first impressions of the village is the exceptionally steep gradient of the main street.[54] Although it has a gradient of 1 in 8,[55] it acts as the principal route through the village to the Brontë home so that there was little choice for visitors but to climb the hill, either on foot or in a horse-drawn vehicle. The steep incline produced qualms in Jane Forster, who found it 'one of the steepest hills she had ever seen' and 'the stones so horribly jolting that she would have got out and walked' (*The Life* 363) whereas, in the biography, Gaskell was more pragmatic and analysed the way in which the cobbles were laid to minimise slippage thus giving the reader a vivid visual image of the road surface: 'The flagstones with which it is paved are placed end-ways, in order to give a better hold to the horses feet; and even with this help they seem to be in constant danger of slipping backwards' (*The Life* 11). Her letter of 1853 adds 'that if the horses had cat's feet and claws they would do better' (*The Life* 438).

Although it is the main point of entry and channel of movement, there are surprisingly few references to it in the biography apart from the personal reminiscences of visitors. Tabitha's fall one winter as she negotiated the icy street and broke her leg is recounted and there is mention of 'weary hard-worked housewives having to carry bucketfuls of water up a steep street' (*The Life* 277-278). Gaskell also comments that 'they seldom went *downwards* (my italics) through the village' (*The Life* 96), which may help to explain why this principal conduit of movement features so little in the biography. However, to return to the biographer's recollected journey, as Church Lane,[56] the left hand turning for the Brontë home, is approached, 'the driver relaxes his care and the horse breathes more easily and they pass into the quiet little by-street that leads to

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[54] 66% of Charles Lemon's 'early visitors to Haworth' identify the 'single street, precipitously steep' in their accounts. Charles Lemon, ed. *Early Visitors to Haworth* (Haworth:The Brontë Society, 1996). William Davies 'Haworth Thirty-seven Years Ago', Lemon 53. For these visitors the street seems to represent the morphology and physical extent of the village.

[55] Consultation with the Road Traffic and Road Safety Unit at 1City Road Braford endorsed this gradient.

[56] *Local Board of Health Haworth,* Detail Plan. (Burnley: J.O. Brierley, Surveyor, 1853).

Haworth Parsonage' (*The Life* 11). As the vehicle turns the corner, the change of atmosphere is almost palpable. Not only has the steep slope been successfully negotiated, but the traveller is reaching the climax of the journey.

As far as the biographer is concerned the parsonage turning marks the furthest point of the village which consists solely of one single street. In other words it is a 'long straggling,' linear settlement (*The Life* 438).[57] At no point in *The Life* is there a reference to any building beyond Church Lane, a fact which is at odds with reality as it omits a part of the village which is significant morphologically, socially and economically.

Morphologically Haworth is more than the linear settlement defined by the main street. At the junction of the main street and the parsonage turning there is a nucleus to the village which Wilks describes as a 'small cobbled clearing.' This area can be identified on Fig.4.2 and is still visible in the present day townscape.[58] Beyond this nucleus the main street forks and around the consequent triangle of land stand 'higgledy-piggledy cottages built around cobbled yards and reached by narrow alleys and ginnels which once covered the triangle of land at the top of Main Street.'[59] It is fascinating to compare Babbage's detailed topographical description of Haworth written in 1850 with Gaskell's biography:

> The town of Haworth consists chiefly of one long street, stretching up the hill for nearly three quarters of a mile in a north-westerly direction. At the lower end the houses are very straggling; proceeding higher up, a long continuous row of houses is met with upon the upper side of the road, which now becomes very steep, until the top of this row the most thickly inhabited portion

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[57] Interestingly two visitors to Haworth after publication of the biography see the village through her perceptual filter and suggest that the village morphology is exactly as she described it. Lemon 48; 63.

[58] 'At the top of the hill public houses, general stores and the Post Office still encircle the small cobbled clearing that serves for the village centre. No-one who has climbed the hill to reach this 'square' will deny its individuality, the old buildings still asserting their character despite the inevitable trappings that accompany shrines of literary pilgrimage' Brian Wilks, *The Brontës* (London: Hamlyn, 1978) 32. See also Ann Dinsdale, *Old Haworth* (Keighley: Hendon, 1999) Plate 18. Wilks also makes reference to Babbage's picture of Haworth, as the Brontës knew it using it rather than the biography to enlighten his readers. Wilks, 30. Local historians considers that this nucleus may once have been the site of a village green. Telephone conversation with Steven Wood, 14 July 1999.

[59] The three sides of the triangle are Changegate, West Lane and Back Street (now North Street). Barker 95.

of the town is arrived at. Here the main road separates into two others, running off at an acute angle, viz., the Colne Road which coasts the brow of the hill and skirts the tract of moorland above mentioned and the Ginnel or Lord's-Lane which runs again down the hill. A lane called Back-lane cuts off a triangle from these two roads and it is within and about this triangle that the greater number of the houses of Haworth are situated. Thus the town of Haworth may be looked upon a small triangular plot of houses high upon the hill, with a long straggling street running steeply down from an angle from it.[60]

For many who have not read Babbage's report nor studied a mid-nineteenth century map of Haworth, the last two sentences of this description, especially, may be a revelation. The village extends beyond the parsonage turning to include these deprived areas. According to Barker's interpretation of the Babbage report, 'this was the most populous' part of Haworth in the nineteenth century 'where the working classes lived.'[61] However, at no point in the biography is there any reference to this top end of the village which raises the issue of Gaskell's reasons for the omission. Why did she ignore an area which housed an economically and socially significant portion of the village?

It is possible to assemble evidence to prove that Charlotte was familiar with this part of the village, so it seems reasonable to assume that Gaskell might have encountered the area beyond the parsonage during her visit. Whitehead quotes Whiteley Turner, whose mother and father saw the sisters walk past their weaver's cottage en route to the moors with their noses in a book. Admittedly this amounts to anecdotal evidence, but it does suggest that they would have been passed through the triangle of cramped, overcrowded housing even if they did not appear to be aware of it.[62]

If higher order goods and services like 'medical advice, for stationery, books, law, dress or dainties' (*The Life* 42) were needed or the sisters had to travel beyond the

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[60] Benjamin Babbage, *Report to the General Board of Health into the Sewerage, Drainage and Supply of Water and the Sanitary Condition of the Inhabitants of the Hamlet of Haworth* (London: HMSO, 1850) 4-5.

[61] Barker 95-96. Steven Wood is rather sceptical about this because he considers that the Main Street area was also densely populated and, in places, like Gauger's Croft, overcrowded. Telephone conversation, 14 July 1999. This point is endorsed by Babbage 15.

[62] Whitehead 51.

area, it was necessary to go to Keighley.[63] From the parsonage it was quicker and easier to take a 'back' route via Mytholmes Lane than use Main Street. The route would have taken them through the overcrowded quarter of the village to Townend and then into Mytholmes Lane. This road, 'surfaced with macadam and ballast at its Haworth end' began at the top of the village and followed fields paths lower down the valley.[64] Robin Longbottom[65] favours this route which did not cost anything, was less steep but fractionally longer. Although there appears to be no documentary evidence for this speculation about the route the Brontë's took to Keighley, Mytholmes Lane seems a possibility, given that Charlotte seemed to avoid the main street of the village.[66] As a result, she and her sisters would have been familiar with this area and there is every reason to think that there might have been occasion to take Gaskell through the area during her visit. However, the following pieces of evidence may demonstrate that this was not necessarily the case.

Rather like Wordsworth, who was taken to task for not writing about the harsh economic realities of the Lake District,[67] Gaskell comes under fire from Barker, for portraying Haworth as an 'remote rural village of *Brigadoon* fantasy.'[68] Barker's preferred view is that Haworth was a 'busy industrial township' undergoing rapid population growth, a portrait which she considers runs counter to Gaskell's

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[63] Gaskell understood the fundamentals of settlement hierarchy, that settlements with small populations offer a narrower range of goods and services than a larger centre. This is because fewer people are needed to support provision of frequently required goods like a loaf of bread or a bottle of milk. Keighley's sphere of influence includes Haworth as it requires a large threshold population to support its more specialised less frequently demanded functions. Similar references will be found in Chapters 4 and 5.

[64] Steven Wood, letter to the author, 17 July 1999. He makes the point 'that the principal streets of the village were stone-paved but the minor roads were "macadamised." This meant a 'surfacing of graded broken stone'.

[65] This information came from Ann Dinsdale, Librarian at the Brontë Parsonage Museum and originated from her discussions with Robin Longbottom. He is of the opinion that the family may not have used Main Street because it was a toll-road.

[66] There is scope for more research about this matter, for it seems that the routes used by the sisters have been little considered by local historians.

[67] Jonathan Bate, *Romantic Ecology* (London: Routledge, 1991) 16.

[68] Barker 92.

seventeenth or eighteenth-century picture of the village.[69] She suggests that Gaskell 'completely ignores the Industrial Revolution'[70] and she supports her view by mortality statistics, details of the insanitary conditions and the mills which could be found in Haworth in the mid-1850's. Although Gaskell may not have provided meticulously researched facts about Haworth, she does observe that, 'the people of Haworth, they were none of them very poor. Many of them were employed in the neighbouring worsted mills; a few were mill-owners and manufacturers in a small way; there were also some shopkeepers' (*The Life* 42), commentary that Barker herself chose to ignore. Instead of trying to lay blame for omission and subjectivity at Gaskell's door, it might be apposite to ask why Charlotte's biographer omitted to mention the most densely populated part of the village with its weaver's cottages, lack of sanitation and socio-economic deprivation.

As the Industrial Revolution developed, the woollen weaving industry upon which the local economy depended became mechanised. The home workers moved from their cottages into factories which were located in the valley bottom because of an available source of water.[71] Therefore the spatial movement of industrial activity from hill-top to valley bottom in Haworth meant that industrial activity at the top of the village was less conspicuous in 1853 than it had been previously. Therefore, the distinctive weaver's cottages which could be found beyond Church Lane became obsolete during Charlotte's lifetime. However, their traditional upper storey triple window fronts still exist and given Gaskell's interest in the vernacular architecture of Keighley it is surprising that it was not mentioned if observed. Therefore it is perhaps reasonable to assume that she had not seen them in their context.

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[69] Interestingly Wilks, sixteen years before Barker, had made the point that it was wrong to see Haworth as a 'remote isolated country village', but he falls short of apportioning blame for the misconception whilst recognising 'that for many years it had been a busy centre for the woollen industry.' Wilks 31.

[70]Barker 92.

[71] Barker confirms the location of the mills. She refers to Ebor mill and 'the vast complex of Bridgehouse Mills, tucked away in the valley bottoms.' Barker 94. See fig. 4.1.

However the reason for Gaskell's rather selective portrait of Haworth may have more to do with Charlotte Brontë than with her biographer. Prior to Gaskell's visit in 1853, rather than any mention of her father's parishioners or the village, Charlotte's letters had been full of the moorland walks that they would take, a prospect consistent with Gaskell's preconceptions of the deterministic link between the sisters' work and their beloved moors. Nevertheless, there are glimpses of Charlotte as a parochial visitor in the biography. Gaskell comments 'that they were scrupulous about entering the house of the poorest uninvited, a sensitivity in which 'they were perhaps over-delicate in not wanting to intrude upon the privacy of others' (*The Life* 42) and they were 'shy of bestowing these social visits on the parishioners' (*The Life* 277). Whilst Charlotte took Gaskell to visit the poor 'in their distant walks' (*The Life* 441), and these were not planned visits, there is no evidence that they visited anyone living in the village. If Gaskell was not exposed to any parochial visiting within the poorest, insanitary parts of Haworth, it was not due to sensitivity on her part: *Mary Barton* is testimony to that. Charlotte must be held responsible for Gaskell's partial and therefore distorted perception because she may have deliberately manipulated Gaskell's visit.

(Of course, an alternative interpretation might be that Gaskell did see the area beyond Church Lane and was even taken to Gauger's Croft, another insanitary overcrowded area, east of Main Street, but, out of loyalty to her friend, chose not to mention these places. See Fig.4.3) [72]

Two further allegations levelled at Gaskell's picture of Haworth by Barker deserve comment. She suggests that Gaskell portrays Haworth as 'remote'. Reference has already been made to the fact that Gaskell was aware that Haworth was not remote being both accessible and not far in terms of distance from Keighley's urban sprawl. It was not totally inaccessible, because not only was there was a paved road link between the two places, but there was also an alternative 'new' road to the 'old' road

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[72] Gauger's Croft has been demolished but, Steven Wood considers that conditions there were as equally squalid and poverty stricken as the triangular area beyond the parsonage. Telephone conversation, 14 July 1999. (See Fig. 4.3)

along the Worth Valley.[73] (See Fig. 4.1) Both roads feature in the biography. In addition, she mentions that the village, although 'embedded in the moors,' was situated 'on the old road between Keighley and Colne' (*The Life* 23) which followed the old packhorse route.[74] However, other commentators do not share this view. Marsden makes the comment that 'the hilly terrain and lack of good roads' made access difficult[75] and Gordon takes the view that Haworth remains as remote to day as it was 150 years ago and illustrates her point by describing the seemingly interminable five-hour journey from Oxford to Haworth.[76] Her late-twentieth-century view of the matter of remoteness is more of a testimony to the inadequacies of the public transport system rather than to the physical distance of Haworth from Oxford. Perhaps Gordon confused remoteness with inaccessibility.

Barker's criticism of the village as 'rural' seems unjustified, as anywhere embedded in a depopulated moorland environment is, by definition, rural. Gaskell identified the reality of the line of cultivation and made it clear that the process of industrialisation with its concomitant buildings was superimposed upon an agricultural landscape. Therefore, 'sensu stricto', Haworth was a rural village.

Whilst Gaskell tried to portray Haworth realistically she was continually conscious of Charlotte's view of her home as remote, lonely and isolated. This may be why there is a divergence of view amongst biographers about this aspect of what is known as the 'Brontë myth'. Gordon considers that Charlotte was its perpetrator whereas Barker seems to take issue with the biographer's perception and portrayal.[77] Certainly, it would seem that Charlotte manipulated her friend's perceptual map of Haworth

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[73] I am very grateful to Steven Wood for describing these alternative routes which have been mapped for ease of reference, (see fig. 4.1) Letter to the author, 17 July 1999. Gaskell refers to both routes in the biography as Charlotte recounts an occasion when the sisters miss each other because they have used different routes, 233-234.

[74] Marsden, 'The Moorlands' 30.

[75] Marsden, 'The Moorlands' 30-31. Gaskell is aware of these old packhorse routes for there is a reference to them in the biography, *The Life* 20-21. She develops the theme of inaccessibility at this point explaining how road transport was subject to the vagaries of the weather.

[76] Gordon 334.

[77] Gordon 329-231. Barker xix, and on many subsequent occasions in her book.

village and thus Gaskell produced a distorted image of the spatial layout. The consequent picture contains little emphasis upon the industrialisation of the village which Barker considered so essential. However this is not to say that Gaskell's portrait is a travesty of the truth, merely that she was loyal to her subject. If there was any vestige of 'Brigadoon fantasy' in the portrait, it originated with Charlotte not Gaskell.

The Parsonage

Within the biography significant spatial and symbolic links are forged between Charlotte's home and the village. The situation of the parsonage is emphasised by repeating the fact that it faces *down* the hill towards the church and the village. The repeated use of the preposition 'down' is not only emphatic but also symbolic as it provides a link with their sense of propriety about social visiting. From their lofty location several feet above the village there is a sense in which Charlotte felt detached from, and possibly superior to, the inhabitants of the village, especially as Gaskell observes on two occasions that she did not use the Main Street. [78] However, the back of the parsonage however, is 'open' to the fields and moorlands, thus highlighting the important link between the sisters and their natural environment. It would seem that Gaskell saw Charlotte's life and home as inextricably linked to its natural environment but removed from the village community. There is another spatial aspect to this conclusion. The by-lane which leads to the parsonage has a distinct bend in it.(See Fig. 4.4) The consequence of this configuration is that the parsonage is not visible from the main street and vice versa. Although it is true that, in the absence of trees (which were not planted until after Charlotte's death) the backs of the houses in West Lane and Main Street would have been visible from the house.[79] Nevertheless it seems reasonable to assume that the bend in the lane might have created a sense of

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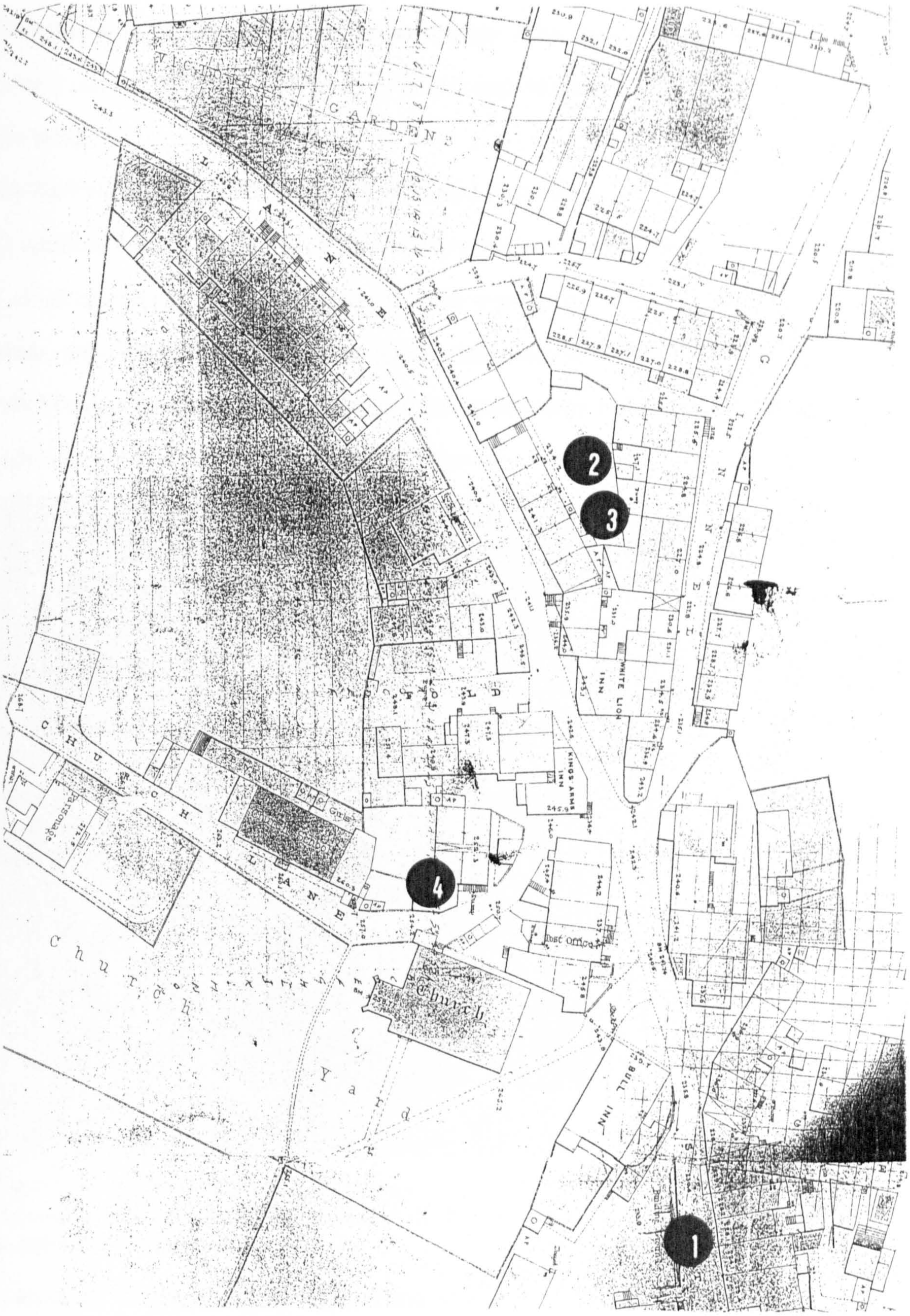
[78] See page 216 of this chapter and *The Life* 96. The other reference describes the sisters' walks which 'were directed rather out towards the heathery moors than towards the long descending village street,' 43.

[79] I am reliably informed that the churchyard trees were not planted until 1864. Steven Wood, letter to the author, 17 July 1999.



1.	Main Street - linear, 'single street, precipitously steep'	**3.**	Triangle of people and poverty
2.	The nucleus of Haworth – bounded by West Lane, Changegate and Back Street	**4.**	Bend in the lane leading to the parsonage - provided a degree of detachment and privacy

Fig. 4.4 Plan of Church Lane, Haworth

Source: Extract from the *Local Board of Health, Haworth*, Detail Plan (Burnley: J.O.Brierley, 1853)

detachment for the inhabitants in the parsonage. After all, it was impossible to see people passing the end of the lane or visitors approaching until they had come round the bend.

Gaskell's drawing of Haworth Church and Parsonage.

In addition to writing the life of 'her dear friend' Gaskell also produced an pencil/pen and ink drawing of her home which, like her word picture, distorts the reality. This point in the analysis seems to be an appropriate moment to consider the drawing as a link between Charlotte's life, home, and the surrounding moorlands. Her drawing indicates a rather bleak view of the landscape which is dominated by the churchyard.

Fig 4.5 Haworth Church and Parsonage
Drawing by Elizabeth Gaskell. Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* vol.II 2nd edition (London, 1857) frontispiece

It accounts for the whole foreground and about half the whole drawing. This is surely testimony to Gaskell's preoccupation with the deaths which bedevilled Charlotte's life (and perhaps her own). Interestingly in her drawing the tombstones are a combination of prostrate and vertical, unlike the biography and her letters in which the vertical dominate, demonstrating that she was aware of reality but chose to be highly selective

in her word-picture. Although there are about forty five upright gravestones, it is not possible to count the number of horizontal ones as they are not so clearly delineated (although there appear to be more than forty-five). The drawing has few buildings other than those associated with the church and the parsonage, both of which have prominent positions. The stone wall which 'shuts out the churchyard' delimits the garden which is depicted by the shrubs and bushes adjacent to the wall. The garden can be clearly seen as a buffer zone between house and churchyard. Just as the foreground is dominated by gravestones, so the background is dominated by treeless hills, covered with moorland vegetation, again not clearly delineated. The parsonage appears to be somewhat dwarfed by the hills which rise quite steeply behind the house, perhaps more steeply than they do in reality. Wilks' caption to the engraving in his volume on the family observes, 'Mrs Gaskell allowed herself a romantic but telling exaggeration of the desolate prospect facing the parsonage children.'[80]

Like most Victorian women, Gaskell would have been taught to draw so that she executed this view with 'the trained eye of the amateur painter.'[81] However, like her fiction writing, it seems to have been a combination of observation and imagination. The latest Brontë Parsonage Museum souvenir guide highlights Gaskell's perception by juxtaposing a photograph taken before 1878 with a contemporary photograph and her own engraving.[82] It is clear from both photographs that Gaskell's portrait was a function of her mental image and artistic licence rather than the reality of the scene.

THE MOORLAND LANDSCAPE – Reality, Perception and Symbolism.[83]

The Physical Environment.

Structurally the area is part of the central Pennine block which lies to the south of the Aire Gap through which the river of the same name flows. It forms an undulating

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80 Wilks 32.

81 An observation made by Andrew Sanders in conversation, 30 Aug. 1999.

82 Ann Dinsdale and Kathryn White, *Brontë Parsonage Museum: A Souvenir Guide* (Haworth: The Brontë Society, 1998) 9-10.

83 To complement the geological, and topographical details given in this section reference can be made to Hilda Marsden's excellent synopsis of her more extensive doctoral work on the geographical, socio-economic and historical background to the Brontë's life and novels. Marsden, 'The Moorlands', 25-32.

plateau surface averaging 1500' although in places it rises to over 2000'. For instance, Penistone Moor behind Haworth lies at about 1025' but, above and beyond, is Haworth Moor reaching to 1250' above sea level. This plateau surface extends south, producing the Peak District of Derbyshire.

Whittow describes the 'countenance' of the moorlands as 'lugubrious..barely lightened by the sprinkling of fluffy white tufts of hare's tail cotton grass'.[84] Its cheerless appearance is derived partly from its featureless nature and partly from 'the rolling monotony of the plateaux'. The underlying geology of Millstone grit, its acid soils and climate of high rainfall, low temperatures and strong winds found at these altitudes are the key to the physical landscape of Haworth. Whilst it might be thought that such extreme environmental conditions would support only hardy, low-growing plants like heather, bracken and grasses on well drained sites and blanket peat in depressions, in fact the physical environment could support trees. However, these heather moorlands are plagioclimaxes. The natural succession of plant communities has been arrested by human activities. Deforestation in the past, and grazing, periodic burning and the effects of pollution today prevent the vegetation from achieving its full natural development, i.e. its climax. However, Whittow suggests that the area is probably 'even more stark today than it was in the Brontë's time, 150 years ago'[85] when although there may not have been many trees, the landscape was covered in a greater diversity and denser covering of vegetation and the moorlands were more densely populated.[86] Scars, which break up the monotony of the landscape, appear on the moor as a result of quarrying for the gritstone which is used extensively as building stone in the locality. Gaskell fleetingly refers to these quarries, demonstrating her awareness of the characteristics of the moorland environment (*The Life* 96). [87]

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[84] John Whittow, *Landscapes of Stone* (London: Whittet Books, 1986) 121-22.

[85] Whittow, *Landscapes of Stone* 122.

[86] Gaskell includes this point in her second chapter in which she describes: 'the grey ancestral houses to be seen here and there in the dense hollows of the moors' *The Life* 21.

[87] Ann Dinsdale makes the 'nice' point that the sisters when walking out on to the moors would have avoided Penistone quarries, 'where there would have been men at work.' This may account for

Millstone grit, naturally a creamy coloured rock, weathers to grey in a polluted industrial atmosphere. This weathered stone partly accounts for the predominant grey tones to which Gaskell so frequently refers and which she finds so alien.[88]

The realism of the moors

Prior to her first visit to Haworth she may have formed a somewhat paradoxical mental image of the moorlands derived from Janet Kay-Shuttleworth, the Brontë's fiction, and Charlotte when they first met in the Lake District. Kay-Shuttleworth's image, like that of Gaskell's, seen through the perceptual filter of unfamiliarity, focused on the wild, bleak gloomy and dreary aspects of the moors (*Letters* 124). Whilst the fiction and Charlotte's prefaces convey this impression very vividly, there is another aspect which can be identified from these sources which presents a totally contrasting picture. Those familiar with the moorlands emphasise its botanical biodiversity and describe the flowering season because they are well aware of how it functions at the micro-scale as well being aware of the larger scale landscape 'sweeps'. To Emily Brontë in particular, the moors were never dreary, for they were a constant delight of flora and fauna: 'I lingered [...] under that benign sky ; watched the moths fluttering among the heath, and harebells.'[89] The last sentence of *Wuthering Heights* summarises Emily's familiarity with the dynamics of the ecosystem.[90] Charlotte describes Emily's love of the moorland in similar terms: 'Flowers brighter than the rose bloomed in the bleakest of heath for her'(*The Life* 109). The moors seen through Charlotte's perceptual filter of familiarity are summarised beautifully in Charlotte's Preface to Emily's poems. She writes:

> The eye of the gazer must *itself* brim with a 'purple light', intense enough to perpetuate the brief flower-flush of August on the heather, or the rare sunset-smile of June; out of his heart must well the freshness, that in latter spring and

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Gaskell's cursory mention of what were unmissable topographic features. Letter to the author, 21 Sept. 1999.

[88] See page 209 of this chapter.

[89] Emily Brontë, Wuthering *Heights* 414.

[90] When Ruth has been abandoned by Bellingham and lies prostrate on the upland moorland near the village, she is aware of the flora which surrounds her. See Chapter 4 176.

> early summer brightens the bracken, nurtures the moss, and cherishes the starry flowers that spangle for a few weeks the pasture of the moor-sheep.[91]

At the forefront of Gaskell's mind when she went to Haworth on her first visit may have been the expectation of purple moors as Charlotte had told her that the flowering season was the signal for her visit. 'Come to Haworth as soon as you can; the heath is in bloom now; I have waited and watched for its purple signal as the forerunner of your coming. It will not be quite faded before the 16th, but after that it will soon grow sere.'[92] However, by the time Gaskell arrived the main 'flower-flush' had passed and the vegetation had begun to take on its customary 'dun' and 'sere' appearance. Gaskell accounted for this as the result of a thunderstorm, for which she comes under fire from Barker.[93] However, such criticism seems unjustified for two reasons. First, the flowering season of heather is extremely short given the low temperatures, short growing season and relatively infertile soils of the area, so that a few days' delay made all the difference to its appearance. Gaskell, a complete stranger to such an environment, would not have been aware of the brief flowering period despite Charlotte's warning. Secondly, her visit was characterised by capricious weather, and being unfamiliar with the locality it is quite logical that in her ignorance she blamed the unpredictable weather.

The Moorland Paradox

So Gaskell encountered a paradox in relation to the nature of the moorlands, one which is evident in the memoir accompanying Emily's poems and is encapsulated in the biography, but has been overlooked by commentators. In the Preface, alongside the August flower-flush of heather, are unromantic, unstriking 'long low moors' and 'dark heaths.'[94] A tally of moorland references in the biography reveals that there are more references to its purple flowering glory than there are to its wild bleakness. Table 1 shows that are 23 references to the blooming colourful moors compared with

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[91] Charlotte Brontë, 'Prefatory Note', 445-446.
[92] Wise and Symington, vol. IV 83.
[93] Barker 739.
[94] Charlotte Brontë, 'Prefatory Note' 445.

only just half as many references to their cold, wild bleakness.[95] However, it is the latter partial picture which has become an integral part of the Brontë myth. It completely ignores one whole aspect of the portrait which can be found in the biography. Intricately and symbolically woven into, and really inseparable from, the moorland landscape are the three Brontë sisters. Gaskell incorporates Emily and Anne's moorland identity into the biography with a passage which is highly reminiscent of a letter Charlotte wrote to James Taylor in 1853. The letter reads as follows:

> My sister Emily had a particular love for them (the moors) and there is not a knoll of heather, not a branch of fern, not a young bilberry leaf, not a fluttering lark or linnet, but reminds me of her. The distant prospects were Anne's delight and when I look round, she is in the blue tints, the pale mists, the waves and shadows of the horizon (*The Life* 344).

Symbolically and imaginatively, Gaskell's adapts the letter to encapsulate all three sisters in the following passage from her biography:

> And up on the moors, [...] the royal ground on which they stood would expand into long swells of amethyst-tinted hills, melting away into aërial tints; and the fresh and fragrant scent of heather and the 'murmur of innumerable bees' would lend poignancy to the relish with which they welcomed their friend to their own true home on the wild and open hills (*The Life* 257).[96]

Anne is encapsulated in the aërial tints melting into the distant horizon; Emily, in the 'murmur of innumerable bees', an association so reminiscent of this sister[97] and Charlotte herself in the 'amethyst tinted wild open hills'.

It seems clear that the source of Gaskell's inspiration came from this letter for the symbolism is similar and both passages reflect the deterministic philosophy which influenced the perception and reasoning of both Gaskell and Charlotte Brontë.

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[95] See Appendix II 440.

[96] This passage is part of one of the most lyrical in the biography. The quotation is from Tennyson, *The Princess,* VII 'Come down, O Maid from your mountain height' Line 31.

[97] For instance; the end of *Wuthering Heights,* 414 and Charlotte's comment: 'My sister Emily loved the moors. Flowers brighter than the rose bloomed in the blackest of the heath for her.' Charlotte Brontë, 'Prefatory Note' 446.

This vital aspect of the moorlands cannot be ignored although it seems that the perpetrators of the 'Brontë myth' would like to forget it. The paradoxical juxtaposition of flowering beauty and bleak wilderness symbolises Charlotte's changing perception of the moors. Given that Charlotte took the flowering of the moors as the signal for Gaskell's visit, and emphasised the August flower-flush in her memoir, it seems appropriate that Gaskell should try to encapsulate this aspect in her overall picture of the moorland landscape. However, whatever feelings Charlotte harboured for the moors before her sisters died, they lost their vitality and became 'a wilderness, featureless, solitary and saddening' after their deaths (*The Life* 344). The key to this apparent dichotomous perception lies in the narrative watershed which appears in the biography. Prior to the death of Charlotte's sisters, the narrative is controlled and written by Gaskell. Once she is left alone, Gaskell allows Charlotte to express her sense of isolation as she describes her figurative burial in Haworth (*The Life* 275). The narrative watershed is outlined and can be clearly seen in Table 2.[98]

Perceptions of the Moorlands

However, the moorland portrait was more than a symbol of Charlotte's changing circumstances. Although, like her sisters, Charlotte walked frequently on the moors, knew them intimately and took Gaskell up, out and on to them, there remains a detectable but subtle ambivalence in Charlotte's feelings for the moorlands, even prior to her sisters' deaths. Was it that the moorland-clad hills were unromantic, wild and bleak; all-encompassing and oppressive, rather than inspirational? Was it that they were all-encompassing from the perspective of Haworth, but once the a climb of 200' up and out on to the moors had been made, then the horizon seemed infinite and the sense of oppression disappeared? Gaskell makes provision for Charlotte's ambivalence right from the outset by suggesting that there are no perceptual absolutes; that responses to the moorland landscape are seen through perceptual filters

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[98] Appendix II 441.

and may lie in the eye and emotional status of the beholder. This approach enables her to include both her own and Charlotte's response to the moors:

> Haworth village [...] with a background of dun and purple moors, rising and sweeping away yet higher than the church [...] . All round the horizon there is this same line of sinuous wave-like hills [...] crowned with wild, bleak moors- grand from the ideas of solitude and loneliness which they suggest, or oppressive from the feeling which they give of being pent-up by some monotonous and illimitable barrier according to the mood of mind in which the spectator may be. (*The Life* 11)

Subtle personification of the landscape is implicit in this passage. To Charlotte the landscape which was not inspirational became oppressive after the death of her sisters whereas, to those like Emily Brontë who valued solitude and loneliness, they were 'grand.'[99] Underlying the symbolism which relates to the sisters there is a hint of Gaskell's own sense of alienation and unfamiliarity in response to this landscape as she confronted the apparent infinity of its horizons. Whilst Gaskell's principal aim was to portray the moorlands as Charlotte perceived them, her own reaction to the moors cannot be ignored for its pervades the whole biography and significantly influences the reader's view of the landscape.

Although Charlotte may have felt that the moors imprisoned her, their 'all-encompassing' nature was a perception which is largely derived from Gaskell's unfamiliarity and the key to recognition of this personal response originates in the sentence which follows the mistake about the thunderstorm. She writes: 'Oh! those high , wild, desolate moors, up above the world, and the very realms of silence! (*The Life* 439) The exclamation represents a sharp intake of breath and encapsulates a frisson of emotion as Gaskell re-captures the memory of her first encounter with the unfamiliar landscape.[100] To an urban dweller used to the pent-up environment of densely packed houses, the enclosed intimacy of the Cheshire landscape or the

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[99] 'Grand' is a word Charlotte used in her 'Prefatory Note' to Emily Brontë's Poems. Gaskell's use of it here suggests accuracy and devotion to her source material and those who wrote it. Charlotte Brontë, 'Prefatory Note' 446.

[100] She uses the same exclamatory response to Rivington for different reasons. Proof that the 'oh!' represents Gaskell's emotional response to landscape. See footnote 25 201; *Letters* 19.

grandeur of the Welsh mountains, where the horizontal dimension was severely circumscribed, it is hardly surprising that she found the wide, apparently never-ending, moorland prospects rather daunting and alien but, paradoxically and simultaneously, fascinating. The ' wide sweeping moors' with horizons which stretch into infinity is mentioned eight times, thus highlighting the preoccupation she clearly felt with such its vast expanses. Added to this is the use of prepositions such as 'up', 'upwards', 'beyond', 'above': all reinforce the impression received by the reader of an 'all encompassing' landscape.[101] Trees are distinctive vertical landscape features and their absence on the moors accentuates the great sweeps and apparent illimitability of the horizon. Although not acknowledged by critics and commentators, by its very omission, the treelessness of the moorlands are a notable feature and the aspect of the environment which creates a sense of alienation in Gaskell.

Consequently, because they are alien, treeless, illimitable, sparsely populated and beyond her experience, the moorlands are 'wildscapes' as far as Gaskell is concerned. The word 'wild' appears frequently throughout the biography and may have played a part in creating this mythical impression of the bleak desolation of the moors as the word carries the connotation of an uninhabited, uncultivated, natural ecosystem. The word 'wild' pervades the text as it is used 22 times but more often than not in respect of the population who inhabit the area. 45% of the references describe the landscape as 'wild', whilst 55% refer to the population in general or an individual as 'wild'. However, as is clear from the first two chapters of the biography, Gaskell saw population and environment as not only inextricably, but also deterministically, linked, so the use of the word 'wild' used in reference to both place and people subtly demonstrates that connection.[102]

The interpretation of Gaskell's portrait of the moors as a vast purple flowering expanse rather than an exclusively desolate wild bleak landscape may not be

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[101] See Table 4, Appendix II 443.

[102] A similar approach to 'wildscape' is portrayed in *Sylvia's Lovers* as will be discussed in the following chapter.

universally acknowledged. However, from the greater number of references to the purple glory of the short flowering season, it must be recognised that she attempted to portray the moors as Charlotte perceived them. Nevertheless, within her portrait Gaskell maintained an overwhelming personal sense of their treelessness and the infinity of their horizons. Those references appear to dominate the narrative.

CONCLUSION

In her biography of the Brontës, Barker accuses Gaskell of using 'epithets' such as "isolated, solitary and lonely" on every page'.[103] This statement would seem to grossly overstate the case, as 'lonely' and 'isolated' are mentioned 7 times each and 'solitary' or 'solitude' appears 15 times.[104] Study of the narrative watershed has been enlightening in terms of these 'epithets'. They are used most frequently in connection with *Charlotte's* response to the moorland landscape *after* the death of her sisters (my italics). It has been shown that Charlotte herself stressed the negative qualities of the environment in the prefaces to her sisters' work and the novels contain their share of such landscape interpretation.[105] It is also true that after she has tasted the delights of the literary world in London, her letters reflect her growing discontent with life in Haworth. For instance, a letter written to W.S.Williams in 1850 is dominated by such epithets, 'I am angry and surprised at myself for not being in better spirits; for not

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[103] Barker 92.

[104] Appendix II Table 4 443.

[105] Hilda Marsden strongly advocates this view and she shares a deterministic view of their life and work. She writes:

> In the moorland chapters of the novels, this remoteness from the world in time as in place is strongly emphasised. When the significance of the fictional treatment of the Brontës' *milieu* comes under detailed discussion, mountain isolation emerges as a dominant, recurrent theme. It was a common family experience to which the Brontës reacted individually, for isolation echoes their own secluded lives at Haworth, deriving naturally from their most constant environment, the northern hill-country that gave them inspiration.

Marsden, 'The Moorlands' 25.
However, it seems equally reasonable to argue that Haworth was not in terms of distance remote and that their seclusion was self-determined. The physically secluded location of the parsonage and Charlotte's social seclusion may account in large part for Marsden's conclusions.

growing accustomed to my lot [...] . The deadly silence, solitude, desolation were awful' (*The Life* 360).

Gaskell included this letter and references to Charlotte's feeling in the biography not as 'epithets on every page' but as part of a carefully observed and subtly portrayed theme which changes and develops as it is narrated by both Charlotte via her letters and by Gaskell as the voice of the omniscient narrator.

'Like many a tourist after her, Mrs Gaskell was gratified to find the "lead coloured" day lent just the right gloomy aspect to her first impressions of the place and admirably fulfilled all her preconceptions about it.'[106] In the light of the foregoing discussion, Barker's allegation that Gaskell's preconceptions distorted her portrait of Haworth seem unjustified. She attempted to balance omniscient narration with her subject's own words out of a sense of loyalty to her friend. If the result is a distorted image of a linear, rural, not especially remote, settlement embedded in a moorland environment which played a role in determining destiny then it is the result of the biographer's perceptual filter of unfamiliarity combined with Charlotte's manipulation of the picture.

It has been shown that Haworth and its moors fascinated Gaskell, so much so, it seems, that her next novel not only remained in Yorkshire but focused on a place isolated by a tract of similar moorland 'wildscape.' Even before she was asked to write the biography she had written to George Smith explaining that she had already begun to keep a record of all she could remember of 'her dear friend' and that she would write of the 'wild bleakness of Haworth' (*Letters* 346). It is the 'wild bleakness of the treeless moorlands' which remains the abiding image of Haworth despite Gaskell's attempts to depict the beauty of a landscape in bloom. For that, at least, Charlotte must be held partly responsible.

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[106] Barker 739.

CHAPTER 5

SYLVIA'S LOVERS

INTRODUCTION

'Geography shapes the narrative' of a historical novel.[1]

Gaskell found a framework for *Sylvia's Lovers* in a 'very specific locality'[2] on the 'north-eastern shores of England' (*SL* 1). It was an area, like the West Riding of her biography, which Gaskell's southern-based metropolitan readership would have found unfamiliar and therefore, to some extent, alien. The notion of 'wildscape' which pervaded *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* is present throughout this subsequent work as borderland wildernesses of moor and sea. They possess the infinite horizons, topographical homogeneity and treelessness that are the hallmarks of the Haworth moors. At this stage in her writing career, Gaskell appears to have harboured a fascination for wildscapes, as they dominated her writing for almost a decade from 1854 to 1863 to inspire first, a biography, and then a historical novel. Monkshaven, the fictitious name for the whaling port in which the action is located, is rendered remote and inaccessible by its wild borderlands. The 'watery' seaboard accounts for most of Monkshaven's accessibility, because at the time of the story, the extensive wild, bleak North Yorkshire moors were crossed only by a limited road network of packhorse routes and turnpikes.[3] Like the sea which is subject to severe storms, these roads would have been impassable in the winter, effectively closing off the town from the rest of the country.

Although economically dependent on the sea, Monkshaven maintains close economic ties with its immediate rural hinterland that is sufficiently productive to support the

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[1] Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel 1800-1900* (London: Verso, 1998) 8.

[2] Kate Flint, *Elizabeth Gaskell* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1995) 45

[3] White explains that the turnpikes which were constructed at the end of the eighteenth century-about the time that the novel was set-permitted 'more sophisticated vehicles to travel on them' which resulted in coach services from Whitby to York which had previously been highly inaccessible, Sunderland and Scarborough. Andrew White, *A History of Whitby* (Chichester: Phillimore, 1993) 101.

town community.[4] Gaskell uses the dynamics of interaction between the distinct but overlapping spheres of countryside, town and sea as the structural framework of her story. The narrative centres upon Sylvia, a young impressionable girl with a strong personality, who is confronted during the course of the tale by a choice between two lovers, each offering contrasting lives and love. Philip's life, confined to the four walls of the draper's shop in the centre of the small town offers an element of 'entrapment'[5] and idolatrous love, whilst Kinraid is a 'specksioneer' (this term is the Scandanavian word for chief harpooner)[6] who appears to offer the 'wild passion in love' (*SL* 386) and freedom symbolised by his peripatetic maritime existence. The precise geographical context is paralleled by the novel's equally precise historical perspective. Gaskell sets the drama 'sixty years since'[7] during the final decade of the eighteenth century within the context of the Napoleonic wars so that the tale is placed in a national, political as well as local, economic framework. In fact, *Sylvia's Lovers* is generally categorised as a 'historical novel'. It is included in Sanders' canon of the 'Victorian Historical Novel 1840-1880' in which it is compared with *Salammbô* and *Romola.* Sanders was interested in these novels 'for what they reveal of three quite disparate approaches to history, and to the treatment of history in fiction.'[8] In contrast, judging by the geographical criteria that Moretti uses to define fictional genres, *Sylvia's Lovers* would also qualify as historical. He suggests that historical novels are usually located in relation to natural barriers citing 'forests; hardly accessible coastlines; wider expanses of territory and mountains' as examples.[9] *Sylvia's Lovers* would qualify on the basis of the third of these, as the moorland

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[4] White 60. Other commentators suggest that the rural hinterland of Monkshaven was of far less economic importance than the sea. M.R.G. Conzen, 'The Growth and Character of Whitby,' *A Survey of Whitby*, ed. G.H.J. Daysh (Windsor: Shakespeare Head, 1958) 53. Gaskell acknowledges this view within the dramatic events of the novel.

[5] Terence Wright, *Elizabeth Gaskell: 'We are not Angels'* (London: Macmillan, 1995) 167.

[6] Tom and Cordelia Stamp, *William Scoresby: Arctic Scientist.* (Whitby: Caedmon, 1975) 215.

[7] Sir Walter Scott, *Waverley or 'Tis Sixty Years Since,* ed. Claire Lamont (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986) Title page. It is likely that Scott may have been the inspiration for Gaskell's novel, a view expressed by W.J.Keith in *Regions of the Imagination* (Toronto: Toronto University Press) 58-59.

[8] Andrew Sanders, *The Victorian Historical Novel 1840-1880* (London: Macmillan, 1978) 197.

[9] Moretti 34.

hinterland of Monkshaven is just such an expanse. Although depicted by Gaskell as a wide illimitable expanse of tranquillity, the sea would not be a foolproof criterion to use, as Monkshaven's accessibility is located on its seaboard. The use of Moretti's criteria to place *Sylvia's Lovers* in a literary genre has brought the argument back to the spatial. This is perhaps inevitable because throughout the story 'geography shapes the narrative'[10] of what might more properly described as a historio-geographical novel.

The documentary informative nature of the opening chapter which charts the topographical and historical territory is highly reminiscent of *The Life* as both works are located in areas unfamiliar to both reader and writer and both beginnings stand apart from what follows.[11] The story of Sylvia and her lovers begins in Chapter II which commences in the story-telling tradition with time, place and characters: 'One hot day, early in October of the year 1796, two girls set off from their country homes to Monkshaven to sell their butter and eggs, for they were both farmers' daughters' (*SL* 10). A documentary opening was deemed essential by Gaskell for two reasons. First, it would overcome any sense of alienation felt by the Victorian reader unfamiliar with the remote seaboard of north-east Yorkshire and its 'wild north eastern people' (*SL* 7). Secondly, there were artistic reasons for such an approach. By starting the novel in this manner, she was able to acknowledge the importance of this particular place because it was crucial to the underpinning deterministic philosophy which threads its way through the narrative.

This chapter will consider the sources of Gaskell's inspiration, the way in which the novel is firmly embedded in a local, regional and national context, and the extent to which: (a) *Sylvia's Lovers* fits Marroni's model of narrative structure; (b) its narrative drive is governed by character movement and, (c) the novel is underpinned

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[10] Moretti 70

[11] Endorsement of this point can be found in Keith who writes, 'The beginning of *Sylvia's Lovers* reads more like local history than fiction.' Keith 59.

by a deterministic philosophy which renders the fates of the characters dependent upon the environment in which the drama is enacted.

THE SOURCES OF INSPIRATION FOR *SYLVIA'S LOVERS.*

Although it may be true to say that Gaskell carried out field research for Sylvia's *Lovers* during 'a holiday visit paid by Gaskell and her two daughters in November 1859' to Whitby, it seems that the inspirational seeds of the novel may have been generated by her friendship with Charlotte Brontë and the thread of her experience, encounter and acquaintance earlier in the decade.[12] Dominating this period of her life was Gaskell's first encounter with Charlotte's home, Haworth, and the illimitable, featureless and treeless, moorland landscape which she perceived as an encompassing wilderness. Her growing acquaintance with Charlotte's perception of Haworth as a 'remote' place in addition to Charlotte's conviction that Emily's work 'was hewn in the wild workshop' of the moors,[13] provided endorsement-if confirmation were necessary-for her own view that inextricable links existed between human beings and their environment. Gaskell was at once fascinated and intrigued by the vast expanses of moorland, and her experience of the Haworth moors may well have inspired her to find her own fictional versions of such environments. In *Sylvia's Lovers,* she depicts the moorland wildscape both realistically and symbolically, and she also conceives another version of the Brontë wildscape that is, the sea.

Aware of, and familiar with, the sea since childhood, as ' her father came from an old dissenting family, one not tied to the land but the sea',[14] it had featured in previous stories; but the way it dominates this novel realistically, symbolically and

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[12] This is the argument advanced by Sanders in his introduction to the Oxford Classics edition of the novel although he is cautious about attaching too much significance to any perceived similarity between the 'Brontë parsonage and Haytersbank farm.' Sanders, introduction, *Sylvia's Lovers* vii.

[13] Charlotte Brontë, 'Prefatory Note to 'Selections from Poems by Ellis Bell,' and 'Editor's Preface to the New Edition of *Wuthering Heights* Appendix 1 Emily Brontë (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976) 446; 444.

[14] Jenny Uglow, *Elizabeth Gaskell: A Habit of Stories* (London: Faber, 1993) 8

deterministically is unique.[15] Only in one other piece of fiction, that of *The Sexton's Hero*, does the sea dominate the action and determine destiny to the same extent.[16]

The connection between William Scoresby and 'wild' seascapes.

In 1855 during the writing of the biography, a chance encounter may have done as much as acquaintance with the Haworth landscape to engender this novel. Whilst visiting her step-sister-in-law in Dunoon, Gaskell went to a house party where she met the Reverend Doctor William Scoresby. He was a former whaler and 'sometime' vicar of Bradford.[17] At the time he was able to provide her with much useful anecdotal evidence about the population of Haworth which was incorporated into Chapter II of *The Life.* However, it is thought likely that he and Gaskell would have discussed his whaling career, and he may have recounted some tales of the perils of his seafaring profession.[18] She may well have committed information gleaned from this personal encounter to the files of her memory for future use. Certainly, she used his book, *An Account of the Arctic Regions, with a History and Description of the Northern Whale Fishery* as a source for her novel.[19] For instance, it is the documentary source of stories of the wild northern seas which so captivated Sylvia and attracted her to the shadowy character of Kinraid.[20] Sanders acknowledges: 'the memory of Scoresby became an important influence on the genesis of *Sylvia's Lovers* and one which may well have drawn the novelist to the town in 1859.'[21] Although there is no proof that Gaskell had read Scoresby's book until William borrowed it from the Portico Library in Manchester in 1860 whilst she was deeply involved in researching and writing the

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[15]Craik suggests that the sense of place in this novel is 'more extensive, more varied and more inwrought' than her previous works. Wendy Craik, *Elizabeth Gaskell and the English Provincial Novel* (London: Methuen, 1975) 166. The author's observation is specifically targeted at the sea whereas Craik's comment has a wider context.

[16] This story together with *The Well of Pen-Morfa* could be used as the basis for a future paper.

[17] Sanders, introduction, *Sylvia's Lovers* viii.

[18] Stamp, 215. Winifred Gérin, *Elizabeth Gaskell* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976) 211

[19] William Scoresby, *An Account of the Arctic Regions with a History and Description of the Northern Whale Fishery,* Vol. I (Edinburgh and London,1820) 100-101; 142-143; Gérin 211; Uglow 518.

[20] In her efforts to create authenticity and realism, Gaskell relied on documentary material. She used the Ministry of the Poor Reports as a documentary source in *Mary Barton* and she used Scoresby's work in *Sylvia's Lovers.*

[21] Sanders, introduction, *Sylvia's Lovers* viii.

novel,[22] it is Gérin's hypothesis that on her visit to the Maxwell house whilst on holiday at Auchencairn in 1859, four years after her meeting with Scoresby, Gaskell found and read a copy of his book.[23] Uglow on the other hand, is more sceptical about this connection and addresses her readers enigmatically: 'were these memories (of Dr Scoresby) revived when she visited Orchardston?'[24] Whatever the truth about the precise timing of the influence of Scoresby's work on *Sylvia's Lovers,* there is little doubt that by the summer of 1859 Gaskell was contemplating a new novel for which she had already been offered a fee. Coincidentally at this time her letters are full of references to wild seascapes and the reading of Robert Chambers' *Domestic Annals of Scotland* seems to have re-activated a latent desire to experience a 'wildscape' again for she requests him to suggest a suitable summer holiday location with:

> wild sea\ wanted /, & wild rocks, & bracing air, and pretty *sketchable* inland scenery, - if possible traditional and historical.–
> Four bedrooms, and two (or one) sitting-rooms in a farmhouse, to combine as much country as possible with sea, [...] we doN'T want a 'fashionable watering place'. (*Letters* 547)

A month later she wrote to Charles Bosanquet who must have offered advice about possible holiday locations ,

> You were right about Flamborough. There are only two bedrooms to let all through the village. We are now enquiring about Whitby- (not the town itself,- we want something \ more / primitive[,] cheaper & wilder,-) North Berwick, Galloway sea coast [...] . (*Letters* 552)

The specific mention of Whitby and the Galloway sea coast, both of which had strong links with Scoresby coupled with her desire for maritime 'wildscape', may suggest that the seeds of the novel were germinating in her mind. However, the mention of Galloway in the same breath as the north-east coast in the context of 'wildscape' highlights her ignorance of the geography of this part of the Scottish coast as she was

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[22] Uglow 490. Uglow used the Portico Library Archives to discover that William borrowed the book on 21 May 1860.
[23] Gérin 211.
[24] Uglow 458.

to discover for herself. In the event, the family went to the Galloway coast for their summer holiday. The venue, Auchencairn, is a small village on Auchencairn Bay.[25] In a letter to Mary Beaver, Gaskell remarks that Auchencairn was a pleasant place but, 'not so much sea as we wanted' (*Letters* 901). The source of the disappointment may have lain in the fact that the locality did not provide the imaginative inspiration for the next novel. There were no limitless horizons nor featureless wastes. Relatively low-lying, landlocked Auchencairn bay on the Solway Firth is a tidal estuary characterised by shallow water and mud-flats which are exposed at low tide, a maritime environment which has more in common with the Silverdale coast of Lancashire than the cliffed coast of north-east Yorkshire. It was hardly the 'wild sea and rocks' requested of Robert Chambers. Despite the lack of an inspirational landscape, Gaskell nevertheless relished the relative remoteness of the village as demonstrated by her delightful letter head: 'Auchencairn, *By* (ie. 22 miles off!) Dumfries' (*Letters* 562).

However, the holiday which had begun with an enthusiastic letter to George Smith in which she wrote, 'Oh! I will so try & write you a good novel' (*Letters* 563) failed to bear the fictional fruits for which she hoped, and may have necessitated the unseasonable visit to Whitby in November 1859. Although it was by this time a 'rising bathing place,'[26] a cold east coast resort seems an unlikely place for a holiday at that time of year. Neither would it seem an appropriate place to restore Julia's failing health, which was the stated reason for the visit. Uglow is rather sceptical about this for she observes, she made the visit: 'ostensibly for Julia' health.' In fact Gaskell herself admits to being in need of a 'breath of fresh air' and she told Maria

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[25] *Dumfries,* map Sheet 84 *1:50,000 Landranger Series* (Southampton: Ordnance Survey) GR. 798514. John Murray, Handbook for *Travellers in Scotland* 2nd ed. (London, 1868). This edition of Murray's guide makes no mention of Auchencairn. The 8th edition names the village 'from which a charming road should be taken going or returning.' Scott Moncrieff Penney, *Handbook for Travellers in Scotland* (London: Stanford, 1903) 117. Other early nineteenth-century guides do not mention Auchencairn, presumably because it was not connected to the railway until much later than Gaskell's visit.

[26] White quotes the Whitby Gazette which suggests that although it had not become fashionable by 1854, it was beginning to attract the 'respectable.' White 107.

Martineau that they had come 'off here rather suddenly in a little interval of leisure, in order to get a taste of sea air before winter' (*Letters* 904). However Gaskell's reasoned protestations about the visit smack of an element of self-deception. From letters immediate to her departure, the visit was not as sudden as she would like her friends to believe: indeed she had planned the visit although she had not booked accommodation as she could not be certain of her date of departure. On October 25th six days before she actually left Manchester she wrote to Charles Eliot Norton: 'Meta, Julia and I are going for a week or ten days to Whitby tomorrow' (*Letters* 582). Evidence from her letters suggests that the planned visit was delayed owing to the illness of a visitor (*Letters* 582; 902-903). Another influential, perhaps determining, although unrecognised factor may have been the fact that the Winkworths had spent their holiday in Whitby that summer.[27] Gaskell would have heard all about their experiences, which, combined with concern for her daughter's health and the need for literary research, compelled her to go there, however inappropriate the season. Therefore it seems reasonable to suggest that the visit to Whitby, whether planned or spontaneous, linked to Scoresby or suggested by the Winkworths, the result of Gaskell's desire for fictional inspiration or a combination of all these factors, took place in lieu of the experience she had hoped for in the summer amongst 'wild sea and rocks' (*Letters* 547).[28] What seems certain is that when she went to Whitby in November 1859, she was; (a) in the preparatory stages of a new novel and, (b) had wanted to spend some time in a 'wild' coastal environment since the spring of that year. The conjunction of the two inspired her fifth novel.

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[27]Catherine Winkworth wrote to her sister, Susanna on July 2nd 1859, 'Papa has proposed for us to go to Whitby from 4-20 August'. Other than this there appears to be no further reference to Whitby in these letters. Susanna Winkworth and Margaret Shaen, eds. *Letters and Memorials of Catherine Winkworth* vol. II (Clifton: E.Austin, 1883) 276.

[28] In the most recent edition of *Sylvia's Lovers*, Shirley Foster considers that Gaskell went to Whitby primarily for Julia's health, although she acknowledges a number of other well-rehearsed factors, including her familiarity with Newcastle, 'her family's marine background' and her recent exposure to the West Riding of Yorkshire. Foster also recognises the inextricable, deterministic links between 'the close-knit, isolated communities' of Haworth and the north-east coast and their environment which is a crucial part of the argument of this thesis. Shirley Foster, introduction, *Sylvia's Lovers* by Elizabeth Gaskell (London: Penguin, 1996) viii.

Gaskell would have travelled to Whitby by train as the railway, open since 1836, had broken through the moorland barrier. Judging by the illustrations in Belcher's book, *Illustrations of the Scenery on the Line of the Pickering and Whitby Railway,* she would have had the opportunity to appreciate the remoteness of this coastal town as she crossed the wide expanse of treeless moorland of North Yorkshire[29], and she might have had Haworth in mind as the underlying sandstone of North Yorkshire produces a similar moorland landscape.[30] Although the town was still remote, the railway was helping to change its function from whaling and fishing port to 'rising bathing place' (*SL* 502).

For ten days, despite wild, wet and windy weather, Mrs Gaskell walked round the town and along the coast without a map, familiarising herself with the topography of the area (*Letters* 717). She also talked extensively to local people in order to collect anecdotal material about times past.[31] Supplemented by the subsequent the historical and documentary research she was able to undertake at home and assisted by a

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[29] There appears to be general agreement that a correlation existed between the coming of the railway and the development of Whitby as a 'bathing place' because of increased accessibility. White covers the ground in detail. He also suggests that the publication of Belcher's book was an attempt to market the route as 'scenic in its own right [...] as the visitor journeyed through what had previously been a wilderness' White, 104-107; 111. Henry Belcher, *Illustrations of the Scenery on the Line of the Whitby and Pickering Railway* (London, 1836). In Gaskell's eyes it remained a wilderness because of its lack of trees.

[30] The Jurassic sandstone which underlies the North Yorkshire Moors is younger than the coarser Carboniferous sandstones of West Yorkshire but its lithology produces a similar topography of an undulating plateau surface of about 1000' dissected by steep sided dales, e.g. Eskdale. Like the Haworth moors, this area is a managed ecosystem as the moorland is maintained by controlled burning and grazing. Hopkins describes the 'sense of infinity evoked by the moors' a description that strongly echoes Gaskell's response to the moorlands that surround Haworth parsonage. Adam Hopkins, *The Moorlands of England* (St Albans: Verulam, 1995) 25.

[31] Gaskell's principal biographers, critics and commentators develop this point. G.J.Sharps, *Mrs Gaskell's Observation and Invention* (Fontwell: Linden Press) 375; Gérin 213; and Uglow 482 depend upon Ward, Seccombe and Chadwick for their information. For instance, Seccombe suggests that Gaskell was 'closeted with Mrs Huntrods', the grandmother of her landladies in Whitby, 'who was a walking repository of the history and traditional lore' of Whitby. Thomas Seccombe, introduction, *Sylvia's Lovers* by Elizabeth Gaskell (London: Bell, 1910) xxviii. See also, A.W. Ward, introduction, *Sylvia's Lovers,* Knutsford Edition, vol. VI (London: John Murray, 1906) xxii. Mrs Ellis H. Chadwick, Mrs *Gaskell: Haunts Homes and Stories.* (London: Pitman, 1913) 254. By consulting all these references it is possible to trace much of her inspiration, although the original likely source was A.W. Ward.

network of people, Gaskell accumulated the raw material necessary to write fiction deeply rooted in the north-east and based on real events.

THE STRUCTURE OF *SYLVIA'S LOVERS*.

The structural foundations of *Sylvia's Lovers* consist of three physically and economically interconnected spatial spheres placed in a relatively confined, part real, part imaginative, locality. These are the town, Haytersbank Farm, and the sea, which together form the major node of Monkshaven, which are depicted in Fig. 5.1

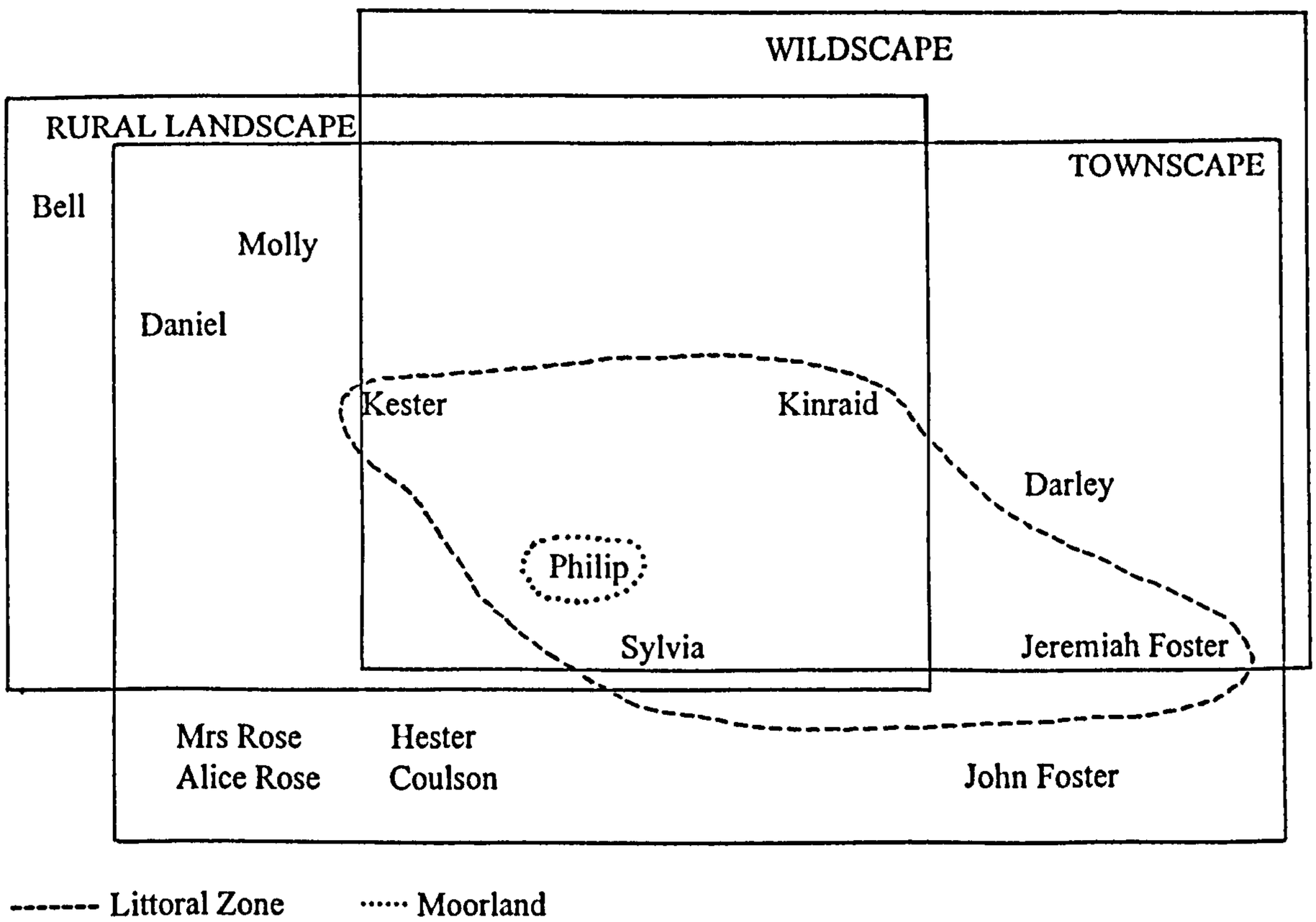

Fig 5.1 The Narrative Structure of *Sylvia's Lovers*

To some extent the spheres are defined by the characters as well as the landscape as there is a fairly close correlation between particular characters and the places they inhabit. At the heart of the novel's structure lie Sylvia, Philip and Kinraid as they each correlate with one particular sphere. They are mobile and create the overlap between the spheres which in turn generates narrative drive. Less mobile are Mrs Robson who is closely identified with Haytersbank and Hester, Mrs Rose and the Foster brothers

who are firmly rooted in Monkshaven. Kinraid is peripatetic, by virtue of his profession and Philip moves according to circumstance.

The diagram also permits a clear spatial distinction of two additional locations that are fully integrated into the text. The littoral zone is a buffer between sea and land in which much of the pivotal dramatic action of the novel takes place. Although the moorland wildscape makes only one dramatic appearance, it is symbolically significant throughout the narrative. Also the reader is aware of its constant presence as it renders the town terrestrially inaccessible, necessitating seaboard movement in and out of Monkshaven.

However, there is also a real world beyond Monkshaven which provides a regional, national and European context for the story, but only 7% of the narrative is located beyond the town.[32] Consequently these fleeting glimpses of the wider geographical context produce a noticeable spatial asymmetry. There is a fleeting glimpse of London which is linked into the narrative by Philip's journey. However, it might appear that neither of the further-flung poles of the Arctic and Mediterranean are so well integrated because the axis of the character movement is missing and the author controls their appearance in the text. Consequently the reader is requested to take spatial and imaginative leaps rather than follow the character when action moves away from the shores of England. Interestingly, Gaskell had no personal experience of either the Arctic or the Eastern Mediterranean, which may account for the lack of a true axiological structure in *Sylvia's Lovers.*[33]

One of the shortcomings of this diagram is that it does not easily accommodate the spatial hierarchy of region, nation and Europe. However, as the foundations of the narrative are built on Monkshaven and its immediate environs, the diagram is

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[32] The figure represents three and half chapters out of a total of forty-five chapters.

[33] Spatial asymmetry is, like the term 'axiological' used by Moretti is fitting for the argument about the spatial context of this novel. For the purposes of this argument, 'axiological' suggests that the narrative moves to alternative locations via the movement of the characters. Moretti uses the term in his analysis of Jane Austen whom he considers 'portrays "two Englands", where different narrative and axiological functions are literally attached to different spaces.' (figure 5) Moretti, 19; 20. The term is also used by Marroni, *La Fabricca Nelle Vallee,* trans. Liliana Smith 3.

appropriate to the text. Brief mention of the wider geographical area will initiate the discussion of the role of place in the novel. It will be followed by an exposition of the three spheres of Monkshaven which will include (a) discussion of Gaskell's topographical accuracy, selectivity and manipulation, (b) the way in which the narrative drive emanates from movement between the three spatial structural units of the novel, and (c) consideration of the close structural linkages which exist between the three contrasting spheres and between the land and the sea. (The moorland will be discussed as part of 'wildscape' that centres upon the sea.) Finally, the discussion will focus upon the pivotal episodes of dramatic tension, which are enacted within the littoral zone. Throughout consideration will be given to Gaskell's underpinning philosophy in order to draw some conclusions about the extent to which the natural environment determines human destiny.

Regional Reality

Gaskell provided topographical security for the apparently fictional Monkshaven by locating the town in a regional hierarchy of real places. York and Newcastle, Horncastle and Robin Hood's Bay are interwoven into the narrative often through their functions or by character links. For instance, Daniel's fate is sealed at the Assizes held in York. Molly, anxious to leave the 'out of the way' place represented by Monkshaven, marries and goes to live in Newcastle. However, the narrative does not move to any of these places.

The National and Global Context.

Philip's journey provides a limited axis of movement. The fascinating aspect of his journey is the route and what is revealed about travel and the remoteness of Monkshaven at the end of the eighteenth century. The moorland barrier meant that access to the rest of the was more easily accomplished by sea than by land, and to reach London, which lay about two hundred and forty miles to the south, a long and tortuous journey was necessary. Philip had to walk north to Hartlepool, from where he boarded a coach which took him to Newcastle. There he connected with the frequent

service of 'twenty packets and other vessels employed in the conveyance of goods and passengers to and from London'[34]

Having apprehended Kinraid, the press gang, who had come ashore from their tender, also had to reach Hartlepool where their frigate was anchored before travelling to their unknown destination. It is clear from the detail of routes, connections and directions included that Gaskell had made herself familiar with travel in this eastern coastal area during the course of her research. A glimpse of London and the southern counties later in the novel helps to stress the remoteness of Monkshaven as well as set the town in a national spatial context.

Beyond English Shores.

Unlike her other novels, *Sylvia's Lovers* is not focused entirely on locations within England and Wales. However, the polarity of place, which is unique in her writing, is not truly axiological because the reader does not accompany the characters on their journeys. There is one way movement only in relation to the Arctic fishing grounds, that is when the whalers return from their summer fishing trip at the beginning of the story. Kinraid emerges from what to Sylvia, and probably the reader, are 'the thick mist of unseen life' (*SL* 113). Appropriately therefore, the elucidation about his working world comes in the form of anecdotal evidence via romanticised stories told by himself and Daniel to the audience at Haytersbank.[35] Two of the stories correspond very closely with those in Scoresby's volume of his experiences but the third, apparently far more fanciful tale of the South Pole which included 'burning volcanoes springing out of icy southern seas' (*SL* 106), has no provenance in that book.[36] Although the reader and the fictional audience experience the Arctic second-

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[34] *The Picture of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne* Facsimile of the 1807 edition (Newcastle:Akenhead, 1969) 111.

[35] This narrative method of stories told within the fiction is favoured by Gaskell, she uses it in *Mary Barton* when both Will and Job tell stories. Gaskell may well have learnt about Arctic whaling from Scoresby in this manner.

[36] Uglow identifies the stories which can be found in Scoresby. Uglow 666.

hand, this place has been woven into the lives of Daniel and Kinraid from personal experience and is, therefore, a potent force within the text.

In contrast, Gaskell's narrative control provides a surprise for the reader at the beginning of the third volume, for it opens in the littoral zone of the Mediterranean port of Acre.[37] Usually Gaskell allows her characters to generate the narrative drive, and their movements provide the structural links. In this case, Gaskell's authorial control, which gives no warning of the geographical shift, creates a structural chasm in the narrative, akin to that in *Ruth*.[38] The consensus of critical opinion is that this authorially controlled narrative shift is a structural flaw.[39] The critics also point the finger at the loss of spatial authenticity for it is considered that Gaskell's evocation of the southern sea is little more than a set-piece description which is as flat and two dimensional as the ocean she describes. Uglow comments on this opening chapter of Volume III 'The unreality of this episode is always interpreted as an artistic lapse, a sign of haste [...] . The scenery is truly "scenery" like the painted backdrop of a play [...] with the reader placed outside the action.'[40]

However, contrary to these critical views, it seems possible to demonstrate that this episode is integrated into the story. Although the usual narrative dynamic of character movement is missing, the continuity of place, character, action and theme is provided by the unifying link of the sea and all that is associated with it. Despite the fact that the Mediterranean is an almost tideless sea, the sound and movement of the waves are predictable, constant, and represent eternity whether they 'make a long monotonous roar' below the cliffs at Haytersbank or on the 'beach of glittering white snowy Mediterranean sand'. Like Monkshaven , the port of Acre was a 'haven', in this

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[37] The authorial control at this point denotes that Gaskell maintains a nodal rather than an axiological narrative structure. At the time Acre was located in the Ottoman Empire. I am grateful to Nuala Long for this useful piece of information.

[38] See Chapter 3 158.

[39] Craik endorses this by saying that this scene is a 'flaw' in the novel although the point is not fully developed. Craik 174. McVeagh in his paper on the structure of the novel suggests that Volume III which includes the Mediterranean scenes is melodramatic and that, at the beginning, the novel lacks unity. John McVeagh, 'The Making of *Sylvia's Lovers*' *Modern Language Review* April (1970): 280.

[40] Uglow 524.

case, against the 'wild Levantine storms'(*SL* 425).[41] It is true that although the perspective in the Mediterranean shifts from land to sea as a contrast to Monkshaven, the reader's role as spectator continues. In this episode, however, the reader is permitted a much closer inspection of the scene than was permitted of the Arctic as the 'clarity of the eastern air' brings into focus the topography, geology and biogeography of the fortified town as mapped by the narrator (*SL* 424-425).

However, whilst the northern latitudes are 'an unseen life' obscured by ' a thick mist' the reader sees the southern landscape 'under a fierce Mediterranean sun, in which the objects' are painted 'in terribly clear outlines' (*SL* 425). A subtle irony may underlie this rather exaggeratedly pristine picture as Gaskell knows that the events which take place here are a plot contrivance. However, by trying to sharpen the focus of the perspective, she can disguise that fact. Stylistically the scene fits into Gaskell's favoured use of contrast as 'the fierce Mediterranean sun' (*SL* 426) is contrasted with ' the cool Greenland seas where ice abounded' (*SL* 430) and ironically within this seemingly artificial and contrived scene, 'the single moment of reality' for Uglow is Kinraid's memory of these cold northern waters. [42] Here again, as he lies wounded 'beyond the ravelins', with little hope of rescue, he like 'the reader, is placed outside the action',[43] and his reality lies beyond the place in which he found himself. However, just as he was rescued from the stormy seas off the cliffs at Monkshaven so he was rescued here by a Monkshaven man, and with that event the reader is drawn back into the action.

Despite the lack of an axis of movement which followed the characters to the Mediterranean, the front line action of the Napoleonic wars gave Gaskell with an opportunity to provide a crucial structural and thematic link with Monkshaven

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[41]The Arctic is subtly linked to the Mediterranean but almost hidden within the diction of the quotation. The word 'snowy' is indicative of the contrast in Gaskell's mind.

[42] McVeagh considers that the novel is structured on Gaskell's use of contrasts. McVeagh 273. The author would argue that the foundations are firmly embedded within the locality on which Gaskell builds up the story by the use of contrast.

[43] Uglow 524.

directly through Philip's act of expiatory courage in rescuing Kinraid. The scene has the effect of drawing Monkshaven well and truly into the national political arena. Up until this point, Monkshaven's only contact with the war had been through press gang activity. However, that activity which resulted in the apprehension of Kinraid, on the beach beyond Monkshaven, and Philip's consequent deception, links up neatly to take the narrative beyond that enclosed environment as both men attempt to become arbiters of their own fate and not entirely the pawns of historical circumstance.

Within the text of the novel as a whole there are little more than fleeting glimpses of these more distant places because Gaskell wanted to confine the narrative of *Sylvia's Lovers* to a very specific but, at the same time, organic functioning place on a 'wild' coast.

THE SPATIAL SPHERES OF MONKSHAVEN

THE TOWN

Topographical Selectivity

In the novel, Whitby becomes Monkshaven. There may be a number of reasons for the thin but deliberate disguise. *Sylvia's Lovers* followed *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* so Gaskell may have wanted to reassure her readers that they were reading a work of fiction. Although it is generally recognised that she did not pay particular attention to names,[44] the choice of Monkshaven encapsulates much of Whitby's heritage and raison d'être, which seems to point to a carefully selected choice. Furthermore, the hint of romantic irony in this choice of nomenclature, suggests that the name plays a symbolic as well as a realistic role in the story. A realistic summary of the site and situation of Whitby, the name Monkshaven follows a similar the pattern of euphemistic place names used in *Ruth* and *North and South.* The first half of the place name 'Monkshaven' represents 'the great monastery' of Whitby Abbey that dominates the skyline from land and sea. From the house in which she stayed on the appropriately named 'Abbey Terrace' in 1859, (see fig.5.4) the view from the

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[44] Angus Easson, notes, *Wives and Daughters* by Elizabeth Gaskell. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987) xxx.

windows and doorstep would have been filled by the cliff-top monastery that had been a ruin since the Dissolution, so Gaskell must have been aware of its presence continually during her visit.[45] However, ironically this dominating feature is mentioned only twice in the novel, in contrast to Bram Stoker's *Dracula* in which drama the Abbey plays a strategic and dramatic role.[46] In that novel there is no fictionalisation of Whitby, for the place and its ruined abbey suits the gothic genre of Stoker's tale. In the introductory chapter it is mentioned as an integral part of the realistic coastal scenery as the 'great monastery had stood on those cliffs, overlooking the vast ocean that blended with the distant sky' (*SL* 1). It appears again in the only occasion in the novel where there is a perspective of the land from the sea. Philip, when returning from London by sea, looks 'wistfully out for the faint gray outline of Monkshaven Priory against the sky, and the well-known cliffs; as if the masses of inanimate stone could tell him any news of Sylvia' (*SL* 228502). (See Fig.5.4)

The use of the word 'priory' in conjunction with the fictitious place name would seem to be a rather unconvincing attempt to disguise the Abbey. It may seem a fine irony that such a dominant feature should appear in the name but be largely ignored in her re-creation of this landscape.[47] However, such an omission is typical of the topographical selectivity and manipulation which Gaskell employed throughout her fiction.

The latter part of the name of Monkshaven conveys the reality of its sheltered harbour located on what was otherwise generally rocky and inhospitable coast. For the returning whaling fleets, the port represented 'a safe haven' after the perils of the long voyage from Arctic waters.[48] In the novel however, the returning sailors

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[45] This point is endorsed by Andrew White. Letter to the author, 2 Dec. 1995. He writes: 'the view of the Abbey would be very fine.' Abbey Terrace was part of the new West Cliff estate that was developed between 1850 and 1860 by George Hudson, 'the railway King'. M.R. G. Conzen, 'The Growth and Character of Whitby,' *A Survey of Whitby,* ed. G.H.J. Daysh (Windsor: Shakespeare Head, 1958) 70. East Terrace, from where Meta drew her pictures was the first of the terraces to be built.

[46] There is an excellent evocation of Whitby as part of 'Mina Murray's Journal.' Bram Stoker, *Dracula* ed. Maurice Hindle (London: Penguin, 1993) 85-86.

[47] Ironic too, that Philip looks to a ruin as a symbol of his love.

[48] White 1.

ironically brought emotional turmoil to those onshore and were themselves at the mercy of the perfidious press gangs active at that time along the coast. Craik noted that the town was a 'haven' for Sylvia [...] when, almost destitute, she 'descended' to it to marry Philip, a decision which was to have such tragic consequences.[49] In the light of events in the novel, it is clear that the name carries heavy ironic symbolism which is missed by Craik. All in all, the choice of the place name is deliberate not only to disguise the inspirational use of Whitby but also to encapsulate within its irony one of the novel's themes, that appearance belies reality.

The geographical orientation of Monkshaven

James Ludlow recognised Whitby when reading the novel and wrote to Gaskell highlighting several topographical errors. After publication, she made no attempt to conceal the true identity of the location and in her reply she admits: 'You are right in supposing that Whitby was the place I meant by Monkshaven.' In response to observations about the geographical orientation of Monkshaven, she writes rather apologetically:

> I was only there once for a fortnight, about four years ago, in such cloudy November weather that I might very easily be ignorant of the points of the compass if I did not look at a map; and I am afraid that I did not test my accuracy by so doing. (*Letters* 717-718)

The letter, in an effort at self-justification continues,

> I am afraid that several of the mistakes you are so kind to point out appear very careless; but I lead a busy life in many ways and I have sometimes to put aside my MSS for weeks and even months; at others, just when I begin to write, some interruption comes, and I hastily finish off a sentence before leaving off writing. (*Letters* 718) [50]

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[49] Craik 167.

[50] The source of these quotations is a letter written by Gaskell in November 1863 which appears in two sources. Chapple and Pollard have the correspondent as James Dixon and the manuscript source as Cambridge University Library. *Letters* 717-8. Benn in her article, suggests that, 'whether they begin with his name or not' the letters are written to James Malcolm Forbes Ludlow, (1821-1911). Miriam Benn, 'Some unpublished Gaskell letters,' *Notes and Queries,* CCXXV (Dec 1980): 514. He was a Christian Socialist, the associate of F.D.Maurice, who became a friend of Gaskell. It seems likely that Gaskell made her amendments out of friendship and respect for Ludlow.

Also it can be argued that because she was writing a work of fiction and not attempting a travel guide,[51] these errors were of little account. Gaskell's inaccuracies of observation are understandable, as on her own admission she made no reference to a map. During the course of her research she would have consulted histories of the town which included maps. The histories of both Charlton and Young have Charlton's 1778 map of the town as fold-outs within their pages.[52] Gaskell knew Whitby lay on the north-east coast of England and therefore, perfectly reasonably assumed that the coastline was east facing. (See fig.5.2) Charlton's fold-out map appears to show an east facing coastline too until the orientation point is studied.

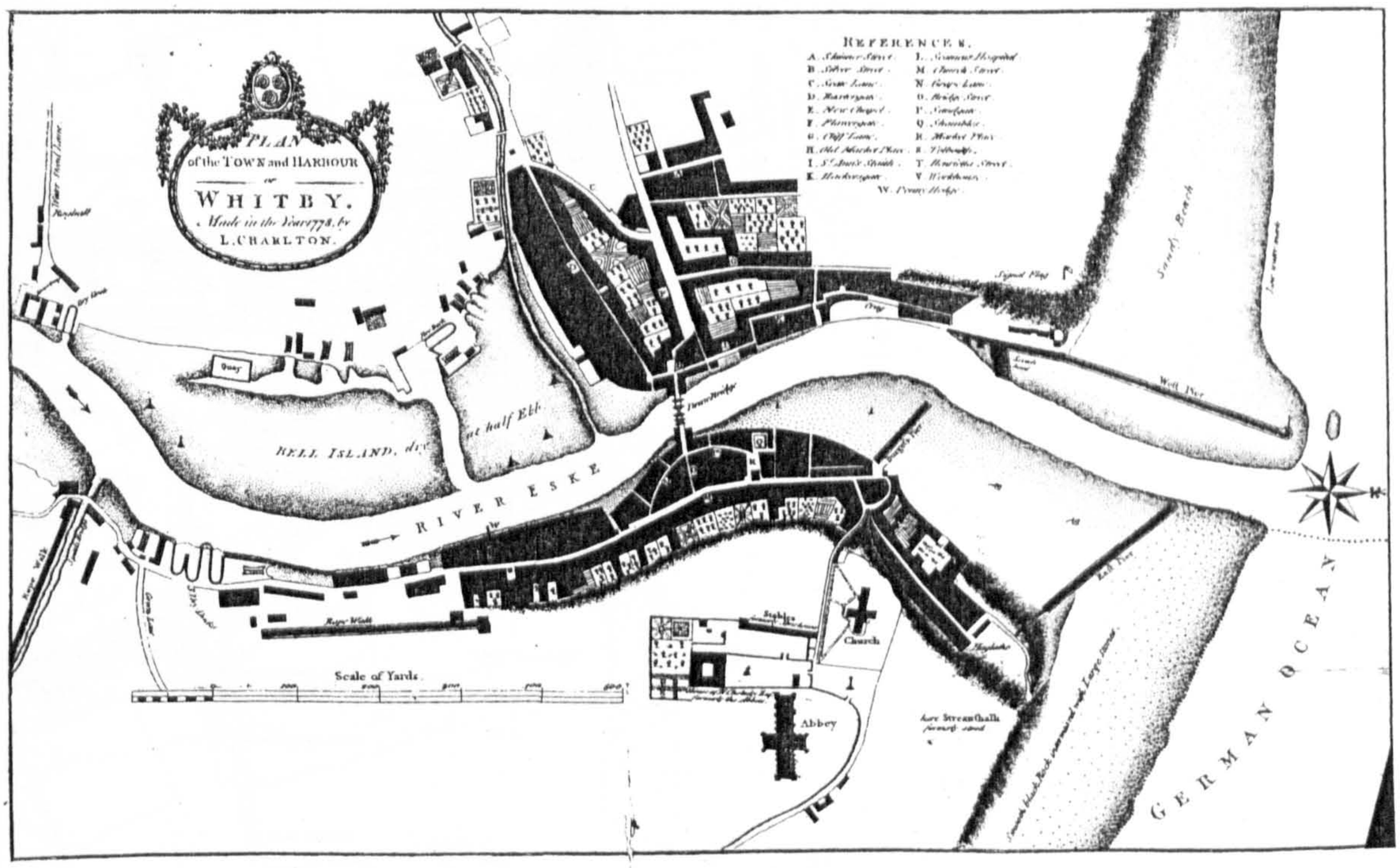

Fig.5.2 Charlton's Plan of the Town and Harbour of Whitby, 1778
Source: Lionel Charlton, *The History of Whitby and Whitby Abbey* (York, 1779) frontispiece

In the light of this evidence, it is no wonder perhaps that Gaskell made this understandable error. She oriented the town north-south squeezed in between cliff-top

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51 Schwartz says, 'the material is presented in much the same manner as it would be in a guide book' before quoting extensively from Chapter I 7-8. Stephen Lee Schwartz, 'Sea and Land Symbolism in Mrs Gaskell's *Sylvia's Lovers*' *Estudos Anglos Americanos,* [Sao Paulo, Brazil] (1983-84).

52 Lionel Charlton, *The History of Whitby and Whitby Abbey* (York, 1779) frontispiece. George Young *The History of Whitby* vol. II (Whitby, 1817) between 496 and 497.

and valley bottom on either bank of the River Dee, which she assumed, was flowing eastwards to the sea. In fact, this part of the Yorkshire coastline is deceptive in that it is oriented north-west/south east. Therefore the town faces north and is built west and east of the river which flows north.(See Fig.5.3)[53]

Fig. 5.3 The orientation of the Monkshaven Coast
Source: *Yorkshire,* map Sheet 32 *Six inches to one mile* (Southampton: Ordnance Map Office, 1853).

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53 The course of the River Esk is geologically controlled as it follows the Whitby fault that lies on a north-south axis. J.E.Hemingway 'The Geology of the Whitby Area', *A Survey of Whitby*, ed. G.H.J.Daysh 34.

On the opening page of the novel, the local aristocracy are depicted as living on the 'south side of the stream'. Geographically, this is doubly wrong because (a) the river is not oriented west-east, and (b) the 'few houses of more pretension' in which the Foster brothers lived should have been located **north** of the town given the orientation Gaskell used because, in reality, these houses were located on the west bank of the river. (The west bank corresponds to Gaskell's north bank. Compare Figs.5.2 and 5.3). As a result of Ludlow's observations Gaskell made corrections for the fourth, illustrated, one-volume edition of the novel which appeared later in November 1863. However, these corrections, because they were piecemeal, were no more meticulous than the original topographical references. For instance, whilst she failed to correct the location of the pretentious houses, Sanders, in his edition of the novel, notes that she corrected some of the references to the northern orientation by substituting 'western'.[54] For instance: 'So Sylvia contrived to get her baby as much as possible to herself [...] and bear it to the freedom and solitude of the sea-shore on the **west** side of the town, where the cliffs were not so high and there was a good space of sand and shingle at all low tides' (*SL* 359). It is interesting to speculate on the reason for these revisions, for if Monkshaven was a product of her imagination, this would have allowed the coastline to face east, and the river to flow west-east thus giving the town a north-south orientation. The fact that she made some attempt to amend the first version implies that she intended her novel to be based on the topographical reality of Whitby. Verification of this point can be found in the text. Having elected to change the name of the river from its real name of Esk to Dee, at one point Gaskell fails to recall this decision and refers to the river as the Esk, thus confirming that the model for Monkshaven was Whitby.[55] 'Thou's been out again wandering on that sea-shore! [...]. I cannot think what's always taking thee there, when one ha' thought a walk up

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[54] Sanders, notes, *Sylvia's Lovers* 529.

[55] Foster mentions that Gaskell has to be reminded about real names. Foster, introduction, xii.

to Esdale would be far more sheltered' (*SL* 367). That reference was not altered.[56] However, although it should be emphasised that it was not her intention to replicate the topography-indeed a short visit to Whitby without reference to a map was unlikely to have given her the skill necessary to produce a perfectly accurate topography-but to use it as her inspirational springboard, a view with which Alan Shelston might agree given his comment that: 'Like *Mary Barton,* the geography of the town is a composite of Whitby and the world of Gaskell's imagination.'[57] Some like James Ludlow recognised Whitby from her descriptions; others, notably George du Maurier, did not, although unknowingly he chose to draw Whitby as the model for Monkshaven to illustrate the fourth edition.[58]

Functional Status

Monkshaven is the spatial and economic lynch-pin of the novel because it serves two hinterlands which instigate the narrative drive. As Sylvia and Molly take their produce to the weekly market they spot the return of the whaling fleet. White acknowledges these ties with the agricultural hinterland: 'Whitby was also the natural market centre for a wide area of the moorland and dales communities and so served all the usual purposes of a place of exchange of surpluses and a supplier of otherwise unavailable commodities.'[59] It is also possible to buy good quality duffle, invest and borrow money, have timepieces repaired, and pawn goods in the town. Monkshaven also offers specialised services associated with whaling and fishing , like net mending, harpoon manufacture and boat building and repairing. In relation to its population[60] these goods and services are of a higher order than might be theoretically expected

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[56] Sanders and Foster both draw attention to the example of Kirby Moorside, a real place which appears in the early editions. Sanders mentions that the name was subsequently but not comprehensively changed. Sanders, notes, *Sylvia's Lovers* 529; Foster, notes, 462. Gaskell also missed the reference to the 'North Cliff' which should, of course, have read 'West Cliff'. *SL* 483. Both editors use the one volume, fourth edition of the novel which included the amendments.

[57] Alan Shelston, letter to the author, May 1996.

[58] Chadwick 261. See also Bill Ruddick 'George Du Maurier: Illustrator and interpreter of Mrs Gaskell,' *Gaskell Society Journal* 1 Summer (1987): 49.

[59] White 60.

[60] Tindale quotes a population of 14,000 in 1796. John Tindale, *Fishing out of Whitby* (Clapham: Dalesman, 1987) 14. Young, vol. II 516 quotes 10,203 in 1816.

from a small town.[61] Its importance as a whaling port had created a demand for the specialised services needed for its maritime economy and has created the wealth to justify banking facilities.

These economic links between the spatial spheres are used dramatically to initiate the narrative drive of the novel. The story begins as Sylvia and Molly, both farmer's daughters, take their dairy produce to the weekly market. Although the novel states Wednesday was market day, in fact it was held on Saturdays in the last decade of the eighteenth century. As Easson observes, factual details like this 'scarcely matter', although the mention of a specific day, even an inaccurate one, can be said to add a touch of authenticity to the vivid and apparently precise locational details of the market place,[62]

> which was situated at the crossing of Bridge Street and High Street. There the old stone cross was raised by monks long ago; now worn and mutilated, no one esteemed it as a holy symbol but only as the Butter Cross where market-women clustered on a Wednesday. (*SL* 15).[63]

Both girls had other commissions to fulfil whilst in town. Molly had to purchase 'dull but important articles needed for a week's consumption at home' (*SL* 11). Whilst she undertook to buy essentials, Sylvia intended to buy material for her first 'bran-new duffle cloak', a non essential luxury item which could be purchased at Foster's. Their trip to the market is dramatically crucial because it brings Sylvia into contact with her cousin Philip, who is the head shopman. The exchanges between the two protagonists as Sylvia chooses the red, in preference to the grey, duffle alerts the reader to tense undercurrents in their relationship which are pivotal to the tale.

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[61] Conzen suggests that the purchasing power was derived from the town itself rather than the surrounding countryside which is confirmed in Gaskell's text for the Robson's were tenant farmers and could not be classed as wealthy. Conzen 61.

[62] Easson, *Elizabeth Gaskell* 167.

[63] There are two other details in this description which may 'scarcely matter' but indicate Gaskell's methodology of manipulation and amalgamation when creating topographical realism. The 'old mutilated cross' was located on the cliff-top by the Abbey not in the town. The market place was not at the particular junction but higher up Church Street towards the sea. Of course Gaskell could be accused of a cavalier careless approach to the topography of the townscape but, as it seems clear that she did not intend to replicate Whitby, this line of argument is not defensible.

The topographical accuracy and literary significance of the townscape.

Foster's shop, the location of the first dramatic confrontation between Sylvia and Philip, is double fronted, faces the market Square and is half-drapery, half grocery. Modelled on, and inspired by, a prosperous business owned by two brothers, Jonathan and George Sanders, it differs in reality from the original in a number of respects, both commercial and topographic. The brothers sold groceries and made sail-cloth, and the shop was located on the eastern side of Church Street (Gaskell euphemistically named it 'High Street')[64] so that the back of the house behind the shop would have faced east away from the river (fig 5.4). For her fictional purposes, Gaskell located the shop and house on the western side of the main street, judging by her descriptions of the covered entry up which smuggled goods were carried from the river side. 'There was a back way from the riverside, up a covered entry, to the yard door of the Fosters' (*SL* 22) and:

> This parlour looked out on the dark courtyard in which there grew two or three poplars, straining upwards to the light; and through an open door between the backs of two houses could be seen a glimpse of the dancing, heaving river. (*SL* 30)

Although factual details like this may 'scarcely matter',[65] the covered entry represents Monkshaven's symbiotic relation with the sea for 'the intricate forest of masts in the harbour' (*SL* 14) can be seen from the parlour. The harbourside accessibility is also essential to their periodic smuggling activities. The visibility and accessibility of the river would be possible only if the shop were located on the western side of the market place (see Fig.5.4) and this view keeps the reader in mind of one pervasive influence of the sea topographically, economically, and in the lives of the characters.

Both East and White emphasise that Monkshaven's prosperity derived from its

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[64] Foster, notes, 456. Only part of the street was known as High Street, the names changed from junction to junction. It was known as 'Highgate' or 'High Street' between Market Place and Bridge Street and as this was the area which features so prominently in Gaskell's townscape, it is likely that it was her inspiration. White 36.

[65] Easson, *Elizabeth Gaskell* 167.

maritime hinterland outweighed that from its 'agriculturally limited' surroundings inland so that Gaskell's choice of location for Foster's is appropriate in terms of

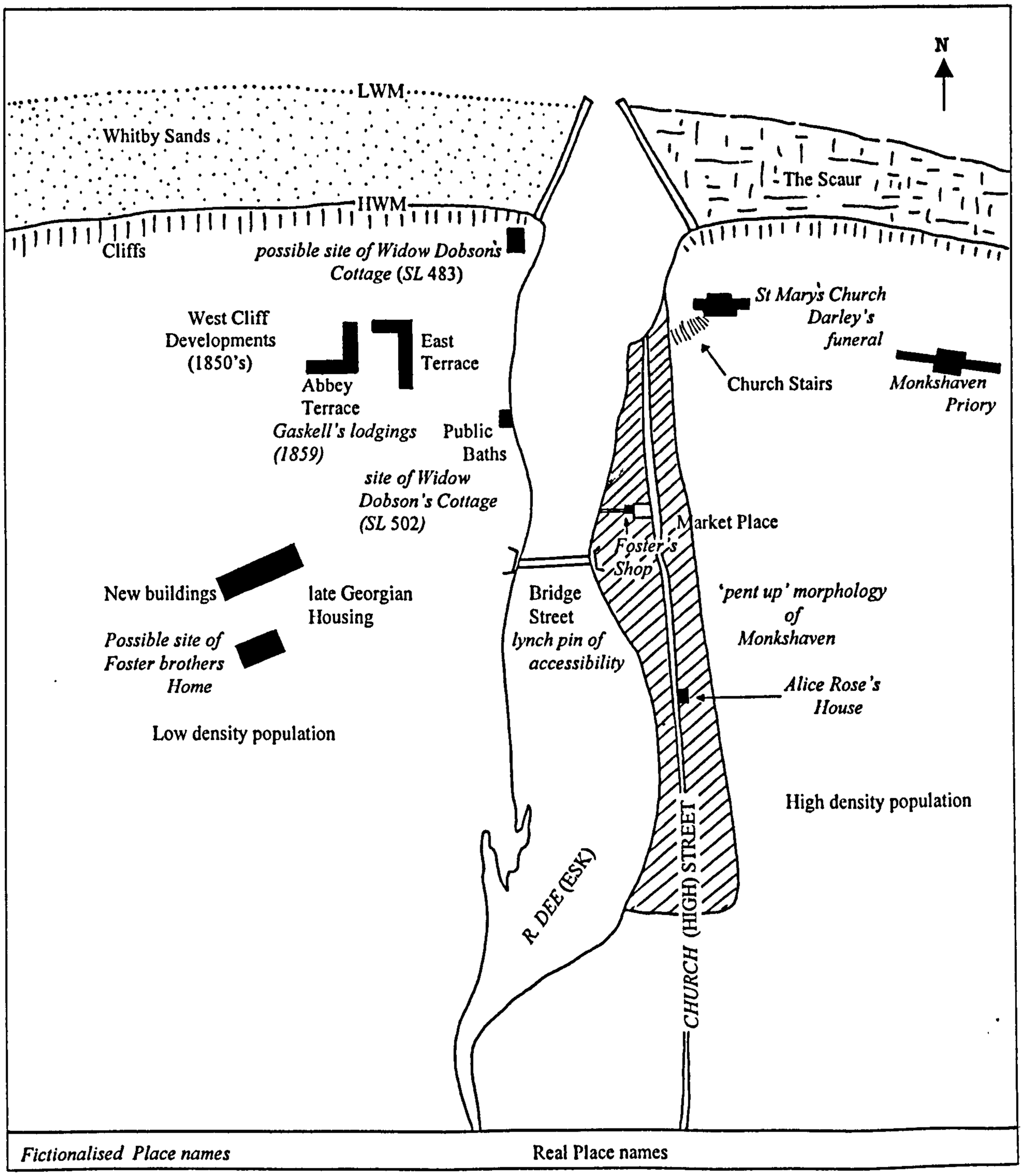

Fig 5.4 The Townscape of Monkshaven (not to scale)

Monkshaven's economy.[66] It is not clear whether Gaskell manipulated the topography to suit her artistic purposes or whether she lacked spatial awareness. The topographical shift of the shop may confirm that she did not use a map, but it may also highlight her ability to use Whitby as an inspirational springboard rather than a template.

Foster's, although not the sole drapers in the town, was held in high regard as 'the shop of Monkshaven' (*SL* 22). Therefore it is fitting and symbolic that it was situated in the market place, which was considered to be the centre of Monkshaven.[67] The central location of Foster's shop is strategic because not only is it within walking distance of all the other major locations in the novel but also because it is the scene of important encounters between the protagonists and antagonists. It is the place from which Philip departs on his exile. Kinraid leaves Sylvia for the final time from the house behind the shop. It is the scene of Bell's death, Bella's birth and Sylvia's misery. It is the place from where Molly and Sylvia run to greet the return of the whalers which symbolically heralds Kinraid's arrival in Sylvia's life, and it is the place where Sylvia faints after the excitement of this event. From this moment the tragic chain of events begin which are to alter Sylvia's life and determine her fate.

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[66] W.G.East, 'The Historical Geography of the Town, Port and Roads of Whitby,' *Geographical Journal* LXXX (1932) 484. White who describes 'Whitby's lack of hinterland' also expresses this view. White 2.

[67]Although Young lists many of the tradesmen in the town, drapers are not specifically mentioned, although it can be safely assumed that there were numerous of them. Young, vol. II 577. Gaskell's imaginative input is clear here as she wishes to endow Foster's with an importance which Sanders may or may not have possessed. Whilst Foster's central location adds to its sense of importance, this location is topographically accurate for it lay exactly in the physical centre of the eastern side of the town as it was in the late eighteenth century. (See Fig. 5.1) Simple measurements made on Charlton's 1778 map indicate that the shop was located in the centre of the eastern side of the town. The market place seems to have been perceived by Gaskell as the centre for she writes that 'the much frequented space surrounding the Butter Cross was the favourite centre for shops.' (*SL* 15).

In addition to its realistic role, Foster's plays a noticeably significant symbolic role because it acts not only as the physical but also as the emotional centre of Philip's life. He 'had meant to shape his life' (*SL* 204) and in his self-determining approach he envisaged 'his future life centred upon becoming 'the dignified position of joint master of the principal shop in Monkshaven, [...] and living 'between the four shop walls.' (*SL* 129-30). His ambitions which lay within the confines of Monkshaven included Sylvia 'installed as his wife, with certainly 'a silk gown and possibly a gig at her disposal' (*SL* 129-30). His attitude to her is indicated by Gaskell's choice of diction. He wishes to 'instal' her begowned in silk as if she is part of his 'vision of prosperity', and the silk gown represents the nature of his love for Sylvia which had a quality of idolatry about it. Philip puts Sylvia on a pedestal and worships her.[68] Surrounded by the strict moral codes of Quakerism embodied in Alice Rose his landlady and the Foster brothers, Philip is imbued with the moral rectitude associated with that religious practice. The 'pent-in' townscape symbolises the self-restraint inherent in Philip's character and this use of personification demonstrates Gaskell's belief in the close links between place and character by implying here that Philip's character was determined by the confined, enclosed environment of Monkshaven. 'The whole atmosphere of life among the Friends at this date partook of this character of self-repression' (*SL*129). Gaskell subtly demonstrates the gulf between the reality of Philip's circumstances and character and his perception of himself.

Philip's idolatrous love for Sylvia also smacks of hypocrisy as he wants her as a symbol of his prosperity rather than for her own sake. This hypocritical strand of Philip's character is highlighted also when he fails to convey Kinraid's message of undying loyalty to Sylvia as he is captured by the press gangs. Having been brought up amongst the Quakers, ironically Philip did not display the altruism expected given the environment in which he lived. Instead, his self-centred action bore the hallmark of hypocrisy rather like his idolatrous love for Sylvia. As a result of his

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[68] One of the alternative titles for the novel was 'Philip's Idol'. *Letters* 667.

position at Foster's, Philip stood 'on the pinnacle of the people's favour ' and would be 'resented by each individual as a personal injury' (*SL* 386) for his betrayal of Sylvia. In the 'doom of disgrace'(*SL* 386) he had little choice therefore, but to leave Sylvia, the shop, his ambitions and his hopes behind him in Monkshaven.

Foster's shop is to become Sylvia's home, and if Easson's view of Sylvia 'as the undoubted centre of the novel'[69] is accepted, then it is appropriate that her eventual life should lie in the centre of the town. However, once she had moved to Monkshaven, she felt a sense of imprisonment and her memories were filled with 'the green breezy vision of Haytersbank -'under the great dome of sky' - where she wore a country dress rather than a 'stiff and stately gown' and could leave the farmhouse without 'dressing' (*SL* 342). These memories encapsulate a sense of freedom absent in the town. However, from the physical imprisonment of her 'parlour' and 'the close streets around the market place', as often as possible she escaped to the sea.[70] She would 'mount the cliffs and sit on the turf, gazing abroad over the wide still expanse of open sea'. The sea-shore represented ' freedom and solitude' as she sat 'gazing at the distant horizon [...] in a sad dreaminess of thought' (*SL* 350) away from Philip's stifling love. However these cliff-top sorties were to become a source of antagonism between husband and wife with tragic consequences. Whereas Sylvia feels imprisoned by Monkshaven and Philip's ungiving intransigence, the sea provides a sense of liberation, which, for her, embodies the passionate love of Kinraid.

By the time the novel opens in 1793, Monkshaven was an economically successful whaling port. The economic wealth had generated a new stratum in local society. 'Wealthy magnates' (*SL* 8;1) like John and Jeremiah Foster transform the economic map by founding an embryo banking facility and change the town's urban morphology. Rather than living, like Philip, 'over the shop', the 'nouveaux riches' built

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[69] Easson, *Elizabeth Gaskell* 172.

[70] The spot Sylvia chose is likely to have been the pretty spot on the cliff-top above the 200' wide beach of Whitby Sands. Hemingway 40.

'houses of more pretension and stately mansions around which lay gardens and fields' (*SL* 2; 1). The Foster's house lay in 'New Town' which was, according to Gaskell 'one of those aristocratic regions where no shop profaned the streets' on the western side of the Dee (*SL* 166). From her observations of Whitby supplemented by her research, Gaskell would have been aware of the streets of Georgian housing. 'New Buildings' (later St Hilda's Terrace) may well have inspired the Foster home. This street, like Bagdale, had 'superior quality houses', front gardens, and service access at the back.[71] They would have been new, only ten to fifteen years old when the novel was set, and still grand when Gaskell saw them in 1859. (In fact they retain their grandeur today.) The combination of the name 'New Town' and her description of the townscape confirms that these houses were the inspiration for the Foster home. (See Fig. 5.4) In contrast, the commercial sector of the town lay to the east, 'pent-in' between the steep sides of the hill and the river' (*SL* 1) highlighting the river as a social as well as a physical divide. Gaskell describes the home of Alice Rose, a humble widowed townswoman whose 'house opening out of a confined court on the hilly side of the High Street of Monkshaven [...] it was wedged up into a space but the aspect of the whole house partook of [...] irreproachable cleanliness' (*SL* 79).[72] (See Fig.5.4) Despite its confined location, it was similar in its spotlessness to the exterior of Jeremiah Foster's house with its 'spotless cleanliness of lintel and doorstep, window and window frame' (*SL* 166). The description of the Foster's home is reminiscent of

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[71] Young has an excellent section on the early nineteenth century urban morphology of the town. Gaskell certainly would have used this source. Young, vol. II 502-3. Young, describes 'New Buildings' as the finest street in Whitby. Its houses are beautiful and some magnificent with small gardens and ornamented grass plots.' Young, vol. II 510 He is also complimentary about Bagdale which is 'wholly new and is finished in a style of superior elegance.' Young 509. White dates New Buildings as 1779 and Bagdale as 1780's. White 57. Either of these locations may have inspired the Foster brothers' home. Gaskell's uses terms like 'new buildings' and 'grand walk' which, according to Sanders provides good evidence that she had read Young's book. (There were several editions and versions in the first half of the nineteenth century). Sanders, notes, *Sylvia's Lovers* 532.

[72] Gaskell may well have had an area like Boulby Bank in mind when she described Alice Rose's house. The houses on this very steep slope were high density, three storey, and galleried houses clinging to the valley side due to shortage of space. Even in the 1930's they lacked interior sanitation. Tindale, 19. Young describes them as, 'small tenements swarming with inhabitants.' Young, vol. II 505.

Haworth parsonage with its clean doorstep and window panes which 'glitter like looking glass.'[73] Gaskell's approval of the cleanliness of the parsonage can be extended to such virtue on both sides of the river Dee. Throughout her fiction domestic cleanliness is associated with virtuousness whether amongst the rich or the poor. Gaskell uses townscape to demonstrate that human virtues transcend class division and convey her belief that whilst they may not be able to control their destiny, the poor are able to control the state of their property. This is further reinforcement of the underlying thematic philosophy of inextricable link between place and character.

Although she fails to be accurate about the orientation of the River Dee, it is used effectively in the fiction as a physical and symbolic divide between two socially and topographically distinct areas linked across the river by Bridge Street. This road, which was a lynch-pin of accessibility, runs at right angles to the High Street providing a link in the novel which generates narrative drive as the characters move about the town. Coulson and Philip cross the bridge in order to hear of their inheritance of the business from John and Jeremiah Foster. After their marriage, Philip and Sylvia go to a supper party at Jeremiah's home. It became an important focus of the action late in the novel when there was a locational shift to the western banks of the Dee. It was there that the initial friendship was forged between Jeremiah and Sylvia which was to aid her later in her loneliness after Philip's departure. When he returned from self-imposed exile, Philip first heard his daughter speak whilst standing on the bridge. She handed him some cake observing, ' the poor man is so hungry' (*SL* 484). The bridge has further symbolic significance, for it crosses the valley up which 'the rushing tide' comes straight from the 'icy seas'. As Coulson and Philip cross the River Dee to visit the brothers, Gaskell observes:

> It would not do to linger here in the very centre of the valley up which passed the current of the atmosphere coming straight with the rushing tide [...] the sharp air was filled, as it were, with saline particles in a freezing state; little

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[73] Elizabeth Gaskell *The Life of Charlotte Brontë,* ed. Angus Easson (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996) 12.

> pungent crystals of sea salt burning lips and cheeks with their cold keenness. (*SL* 166)

This description, tangible in the way in which Gaskell invites the reader to feel the burning sensation of the salt suspended in the air, highlights the fact that the sea is a visible, tangible and, therefore, integral part of the townscape.

Gaskell's portrait of Monkshaven contains a combination of a topographically accurate townscape on which is superimposed the superficial disguise of fictitious names and some topographical vaguenesss. Another instance firmly rooted in the real townscape and in the novel's events is the Parish church of St Mary's which becomes St Nicholas' in the text. Located on the eastern cliff-top not far from the Priory, it is accessible by 199 steps necessitated by the steep valley slope to the east of the river Esk.[74] The steps appear in the novel as:

> the long flights of stone steps-worn by the feet of many of generations- which led up to the parish church, placed on a height above the town, on a great green area at the summit of the cliff, which was the angle where the river and the sea met, and so overlooking both the busy crowded little town, the port, the shipping and the bar on the one hand, and the wide illimitable, tranquil sea on the other-types of life and eternity. (*SL* 63).

Gaskell expatiates about 'the church stair', describing the way in which: 'each flight of steps [...] ended in a small flat space, on which a wooden seat was placed. On this particular Sunday, all these seats were filled by aged people breathless with the unusual exertion of climbing' (*SL* 64).[75] (See Fig.5.4)

Gaskell includes this authentic detail because, first, it draws the reader into the reality of climbing the steps necessitated by the steep valley side, and secondly because she wishes to create a well-realised and appropriately symbolic environment for the first encounter between Sylvia and Kinraid. It took place at Darley's funeral, held at the cliff-top church on the edge of the land from which vantage point the sea dominates

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[74] Sanders quotes the variety of numbers of steps which he has found in the course of his research starting with 190 in 1817 to 196 in 1859. Sanders, notes, 519 White quotes 199 in the present day landscape which he suggests represents an increase which tallies with Sanders' conclusions. White 157.

[75] The stairs are still there as she describes them and although some seats remain they are not as frequent as Gaskell suggests. White explains that there were wider steps on which coffins could be rested. White 157.

the view. The interactive relationship between land and sea is demonstrated not only by the location of the funeral but also by the death of the sailor which was determined by the actions of the press gang on the returning whaling fleet.

If it is easy to find the church stairs and the inspiration for St Nicholas' Church in the real townscape, the location of the Mariner's Arms is more elusive, despite attempts to piece together the clues given. Foster suggests Haggersgate on the opposite side of the river as a possible location but gives no reason for this conclusion. However, she then refutes the suggestion using textual and topographical evidence which she says indicates that the Mariner's Arms seems to be close to Foster's shop.[76] As Gaskell was creating fiction, this would seem to be closer to the truth because she is permitted artistic licence with her townscapes.

Towards the end of the story, the topography of the novel shifts to the western side of the River Dee as Widow Dobson's isolated cottage becomes the focus of the action. It is located 'at the end of the newly cut road which was to lead to the terrace road around the North Cliff,[77] a road which led to no dwelling but Widow Dobson's' (*SL* 483) it is difficult to pinpoint on an eighteenth-century map of Whitby. In White's opinion which is endorsed by Shirley Foster,

> the location (of the cottage) suggested by the text is somewhere near where the Battery stood, at the foot of the Khyber Pass, cut in about 1848. If this is 'the newly-cut road' of the novel, then it is an anachronism for a story set in the 1790's. There were, in any case, no private houses in this area. I think the author is using two separate locations and fictionally combining them.[78]

Whether the location of the cottage is topographically inaccurate to the point of fabrication or not, Gaskell needed the constancy of the lapping waves to symbolise the eternity of the sea in the closing pages of the story. Therefore she located the cottage somewhere near the sea on the western side of the river without being too

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[76]Foster, notes, 457. Although Foster gives no attribution for this theory, it is likely that it came from Ward, introduction, xxii. Sanders, in his edition does not commit himself to a topographical location for this building in his footnotes perhaps because there is insufficient evidence.

[77] Should read 'West Cliff, see footnote 56.

[78] White, letter to the author, 2 Dec. 1995; Foster, notes, 475.

precise about its late eighteenth century topographical accuracy. Her technique here is similar to the manipulated, imaginative relocation of Foster's shop. (See Fig.5.4) Whether 'Mrs Gaskell altered the facts a little to suit her purpose'[79] or whether she was vague due to unfamiliarity it seems that she was using her experience of Whitby as an inspirational springboard rather than attempting to replicate its reality in her portrait of Monkshaven. She wanted to create a townscape into which she could weave symbolically and realistically the events, characters and themes of her story.

THE FARM

Location

However, although Gaskell acknowledged that she used Whitby as the inspiration for *Sylvia's Lovers,* she was adamant that her work was an imaginative creation and not rooted in mappable reality: 'I did not intend Haytersbank for any particular place, or if I had some faint recollection of a farm-house like it, it must have been a place near Sunderland where I once stayed for a couple of nights' (*Letters* 718). Therefore attempts to locate the farm in the 20th century landscape must be doomed to failure, although several writers have tried specific identification.[80] There is conflicting evidence in the text about the relation of farm to town. Ward considered that: 'the site of Haytersbank was on the way to Robin Hood's Bay to the south-east of Whitby' [81]

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[79] Chadwick 264.

[80] Ward, introduction, xiv; Seccombe, introduction, xxxi and Chadwick 265 attempt to locate the farm. The late Mrs Kate Mayston who led walks round the Whitby of the novel suggests that two farms in the present day landscape fit Haystersbank and Moss Brow perfectly. Sandfield (GR 879115) is the model for Haytersbank and Moss Brow is modelled upon High Straggleton Farm.(GR 875115) *Whitby,*map Sheet 94 1:50,000 Landranger Series (Southampton: Ordnance Survey). Kate Mayston, letter to the author 2 Oct. 1994. In the light of Gaskell's own comment quoted above, this close identification which extended to interiors seems rather fanciful.

[81] Ward, introduction, xxiv. Foster, having quoted Chadwick, supports the evidence for a location on the western cliff top and concludes that Ward's view is 'topographically a less convincing suggestion'. Foster, introduction, x.

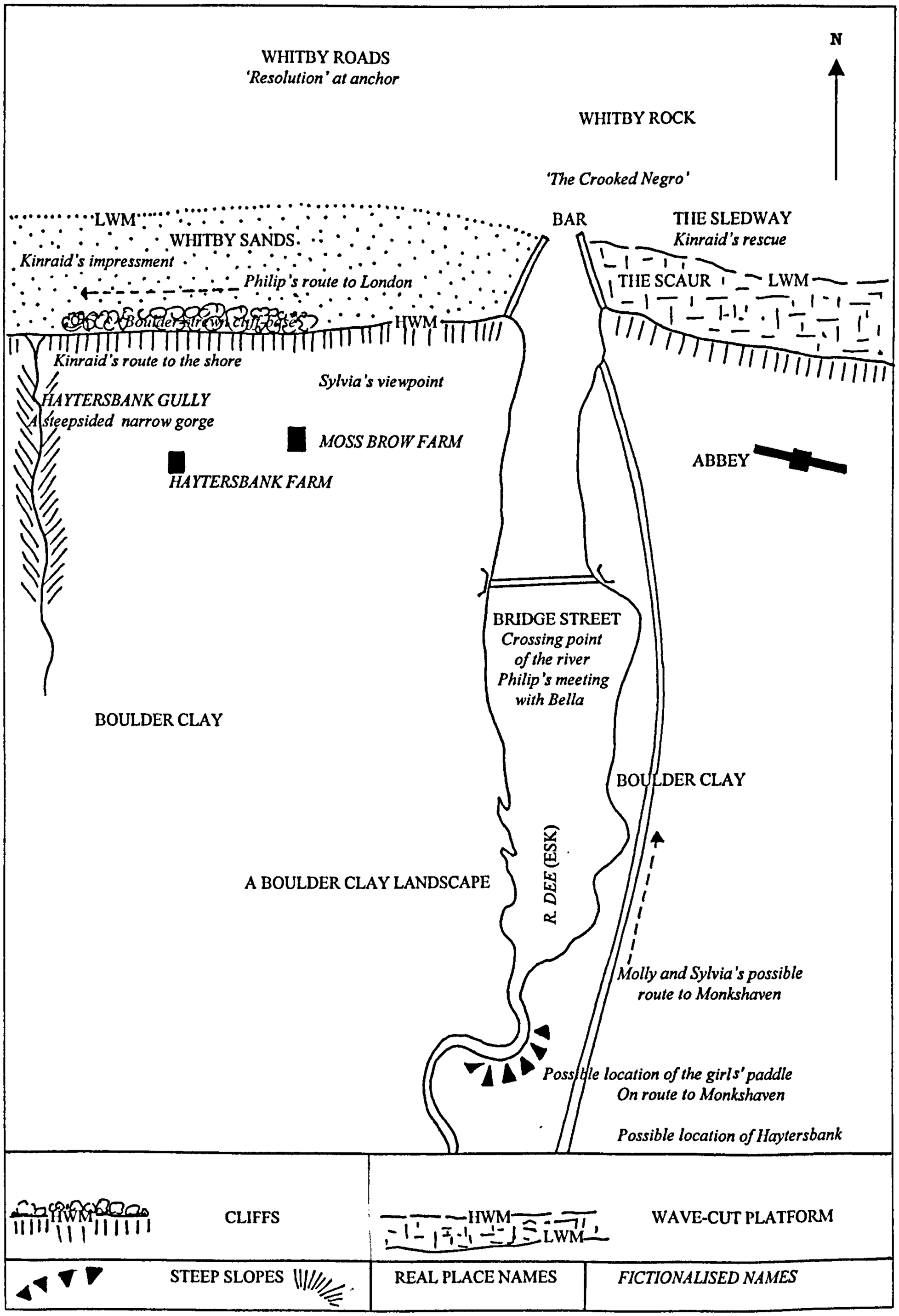

Fig 5.5 The Geography of *Sylvia's Lovers* (not to scale)

because of the perspective of Monkshaven offered by characters going to and from the farm. There is no textual evidence that they cross the river that endorses Ward's suggestion. However, this location is impossibly far from the sea for the reader knows that the farm was located at the head of Haytersbank gully within sight and sound of that wildscape.

These gullies are steep sided, narrow gorges which dissect the cliffs to the west of the town, so this locational reference would seem to suggest a mappable geographical position for the farm on the western cliff-top near one of the 'chines' which dissect those cliffs providing a point of access to the beach below.[82] The gully plays such a pivotal role in the action, that it seems that she imagined the farm on the western cliff-top. The site of the farm provides further endorsement of this preferred location because it, like the gully, is carefully woven into the narrative. The gently undulating topography of the farm with its 'little eminencies' and approach lane full of 'rough round stones' is a clear sign of a boulder clay landscape.[83] White confirms that Gaskell's awareness of the geology is correct: 'On the west side of the harbour the cliff is much lower and very largely a capping of boulder clay over sandstone'.[84] As well as helping to confirm the location of the farm, the landscape is woven into the narrative. 'Robson was fidgeting in and out of his house-door climbing the little eminence in the field, [...] disappointed [...] by Sylvia's non-appearance' (*SL* 36).

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[82] Gaskell identifies these features for the reader by the use of the term 'chine' commonly used on the Isle of Wight and the south coast for these ravines. John Whittow *Dictionary of Physical Geography,* (London: Penguin, 1984) 91. The reference would help the average Victorian metropolitan reader and middle-class reader who was more likely to be familiar with the south rather than this remote corner of north-east coast of England.

[83] **Boulder Clay** is a glacial deposit which coats underlying rock to subdue the topography, usually producing a gently undulating landscape. In this locality, the extensive covering has actually produced cliffs that rise to over 200' to the west of Whitby. Hemingway, 24-26. Therefore, Gaskell creates an accurate picture of a landscape produced by glacial deposition.

These hummocks give Robson a good view of the lane and allow Gaskell to build up dramatic tension when Sylvia did not appear. Such moments provide an opportunity to establish the protagonist's position as a cherished member of the family and her close physical and emotional attachment to Haytersbank. Both possible sites, the western cliff-top and the south-east, are part of the geographical reality of Whitby and it is possible to produce a map, (which has been annotated to show the dramatic significance of the sites) to accompany the story even if some of the spatial relationships lack geographical continuity. (See Fig. 5.5)

The Farm and the northern domestic economy

As the protagonist's home and a working farm, Haytersbank is an important place in the novel. It forms a dramatic locus for two-thirds of the tale up to the beginning of Volume III,[85] when Sylvia and her mother leave after Daniel's death. Its commercial links with Monkshaven initiate the story and throughout the first two volumes Haytersbank generates plenty of narrative drive as characters move to and from the farm. Daniel pursues his farming business, cares for Sylvia and opposes the press gangs. Philip visits frequently as a nephew, cousin and wooer of Sylvia. Kinraid too, under the pretext of sharing maritime experiences with Daniel, is attracted by his daughter and visits on several occasions.

Given its northern latitude, exposed, probably western, cliff-top location and boulder clay soil, Haytersbank is a mixed farm with the emphasis on livestock. In addition to pigs, Robson kept cows, hens, and sheep, all of which yielded produce both for their own consumption with some surplus like their home-produced butter and eggs which were taken to the weekly market at Monkshaven. Although Gaskell does not specify, it is certain that the farm's arable land would have supported fodder rather than

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[84] White 1. *Whitby and Scalby,* Drift map Sheet 35 *One inch to one mile* (Southampton: Geological Survey of Great Britain, 1857) clearly shows the distribution of boulder clay.

[85] The end of Chapter XXVII. *SL* 424.

commercial cereal crops due to the adverse physical environment.[86] The acreage of arable land is of dramatic significance for it determines the fates of Sylvia and her mother after Daniel's death. In conversation with Kester, Sylvia admits that she is unable to manage a mixed farm which has so much arable land use: 'What could we do wi' t' farm and land? If it were all dairy I might ha' done, but wi' so much on it arable [...] . It would take two pairs o' men's hands to keep t' land up as Measter Hall likes it' (*SL* 322).

Haytersbank is an example of a 'bleak northern farmstead' (*SL* 85), where the seasonal jobs are determined not only by the weather but also by tradition. There are jobs which must be completed 'before November weather should make the roads too heavy for half-fed horses to pull carts through' (*SL* 85). Although not a farmer by birth or upbringing, (he is a tenant at Haytersbank), Daniel is occupied with paring up moorland turf, and drying it for fuel. He must also store brown fern, i.e. bracken, as winter bedding for the animals, store wood, grind corn and kill the pig. The latter was essential: 'For, up in the north there is an idea that the ice stored in the first frost will melt, and the meat cured then taint; the first frost is good for nothing but to be thrown away, as they express it' (85). The picture presented suggests a high degree of self-sufficiency and a particularly realistic regional farm economy.

In addition to being represented as a microcosm of the northern rural commercial economy, Gaskell also creates a picture of a realistic picture of its domestic economy. The interior of the farmhouse with its plentiful pantry, cosy chimney corner, racks of fresh bread, and bustling activity of butter and porridge making, the pickling and curing of beef and salting of the hams creates a vivid realisation of the place. A Cumberland woman, Bell Robson practises northern tradition of home baking and the cooking of local recipes in her kitchen but, as they do not originate in Yorkshire, they

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[86] Geographers fail to agree about the fertility of the soils formed on this boulder clay. East claims that 'the heavy barren clay soil was enriched in the 18c by kelp'. East, 486. Hemingway, on the other hand, considers that the soils are naturally fertile. Hemingway 28. Certainly the boulder clay soils of East Anglia which overlie chalk are fertile partly because of the presence of an essential nutrient, calcium, which is derived from the underlying rock. The dissension matters little perhaps as the determining factors of land use are exposed location and the cool climate.

are not entirely to the local taste and have habit of making her unpopular: 'The great rack of clap-bread hung overhead, and Bell Robson's preference for this kind of oat-cake over the leavened and partly sour kind used in Yorkshire was another source of her unpopularity'(*SL* 36). She also makes 'turf cakes' and 'singing hinnies' with which it is the delight of northern housewives to regale the honoured guest' (*SL* 36). It is noteworthy that Gaskell is able to highlight subtleties of domesticity which exist within the north, so familiar is she with such local and regional nuances.[87]

However, as the daughter of 'outsiders', - neither parent was locally born and bred - Sylvia is receptive to and attracted by another outsider, Kinraid. This attraction is symbolised in the donation of home-made sausages which are cooked, not to a Yorkshire but to a Cumberland recipe so that although they originate within the north, they would not have the seal of approval from local people. Nevertheless, Bell is proud of her sausages and suggests that the wounded Kinraid might appreciate them as he convalesces at Moss Brow. Sylvia takes great pains to display the sausages attractively before she takes them to the neighbouring farm. She requests a damask napkin in which to wrap them and decorates the basket with flowers from the garden *(SL 86)*.

By maximising the dramatic use of physical landscape and interweaving the domestic economy into Sylvia's developing passion for Kinraid, Gaskell demonstrates the inextricability of the links between place, narrative and character.

'WILDSCAPES'

The Moorland

Although reference has been made to the physical restrictions created by the extensive moorland hinterland which enclosed Monkshaven, it is necessary to consider the way in which Gaskell wove this 'wildscape' into the novel's fabric.

In the first documentary chapter Gaskell demonstrates her knowledge of moorland geology, topography and ecology. The underlying sandstone produces outcrops of 'red

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[87] There similarities here with Alice Wilson in *Mary Barton* who is a Cumberland woman and brings her country traditions to the urban environment of Manchester.

freestone' with little vegetation but on the sandy soils 'there was the purple ling, or commonest species of heather growing in beautiful wild luxuriance' (*SL* 3). Fine tufted grasses are used for sheep grazing and in the hollows where the drainage is impeded, peat bogs are found. The North Yorkshire Moors are just as she describes, down to the detail of the Scottish Blackface, which are the local breed.[88] There is a sense in which Gaskell has become familiar with the infinite variety of the moorlands. For the purposes of the opening of the narrative that occurs in October, she depicts the 'moorland heights swelling one behind the other' in their autumn glory of 'the russet brown with the tints of fading bracken'. This accurate picture is highly reminiscent of the Haworth Moors that so intrigued Gaskell on first acquaintance.

The moorland becomes the locus of the action only once in the novel when Philip breaks away from the constraints of the town having confronted the consequences of his own actions. He was 'trammelled by reason and self-restraint' (*SL* 386), a view of life determined by the enclosed nature of the town, so that his insight into the spectrum of human emotion was limited. As a result he lacked the foresight to appreciate the consequences of his betrayal of Sylvia and Kinraid so that, after Kinraid's second rescue by Monkshaven inhabitants, when Philip realised that he could no longer command the respect of his fellow townspeople, he quitted the town. Although the obvious route out of the town was by sea, because of its associations with Kinraid, 'Philip turned his back on the vast sunny sea with loathing' (*SL* 388) and plunged across the vast, illimitable expanse of treeless moor. Within this environment which permits no shelter, his physical exposure symbolises his confrontation with the extremes of human emotion for the first time. Not only does his unfocused movement increase the narrative pace but its style heightens the narrative tension as 'he plunged and panted [...] strode and tramped' (*SL* 388-389) across the area. Physically lost and exposed on the moorland plateau, Philip became

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88 *OS Leisure Guide to the North York Moors,* Revised ed. (Ordnance Survey and AA, 1992) 14-22 confirms these details of the physical environment. The Swaledale sheep which are now the most common breed found on the moors were not introduced until the 1920's Until then, The Scottish blackface were the principal breed.

unshackled from the social, moral and religious mores of Monkshaven and, here, in order to become arbiter of his own destiny, he volunteered to join up. Subsequently, his unexpected encounter with Kinraid at Acre enabled him to expiate his sins. However, in the tragic, if somewhat coincidental, dénouement of the tale, the sea is the final arbiter of Philip's destiny as the freak destructive wave wreaked revenge on him for his deceit, hypocrisy and betrayal of the 'wild passion in love' (*SL* 386) between Sylvia and Kinraid.

To Gaskell the moorlands are 'wild' because of their physical qualities of treeless illimitability, and she transfers this epithet to her characters to symbolise freedom and the infinite possibilities of human emotion. The table of word counts[89] shows that the word refers to Philip at pivotal moments in his life when Gaskell wishes to demonstrate the undercurrents of passion: for instance, at the moment of his betrayal of Sylvia, on subsequent occasions when he feels under threat from their relationship and finally when lost on the moors in self-imposed exile. On two of those occasions Philip is beyond Monkshaven, appropriately either within or close to one of Gaskell's 'wildscapes.'

The Sea

Inextricably linked to the lives of all those who appear in the story, either directly or indirectly, the sea is woven symbolically and realistically into the narrative from the beginning. It appears as both a major structural element, an axis of movement, Kinraid's natural habitat and the basis of Monkshaven's economy. For instance, 'for twenty miles around there was no forgetting the sea' as whalebones decorate the countryside; seaweed is used as agricultural fertiliser; 'the intricate forest of masts in the harbour' (*SL* 14) were visible from Foster's shop; cold, salty sea air was funnelled up the Dee valley and the rising tide brought in the whaling fleet. The sea casts a blight on the physical and socio-economic framework of the area. Rural depopulation

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[89] See Appendix III 444.

has occurred due to the rise and economic success of the whaling industry, as 'out of every family of several sons, however agricultural their position might be, one had gone to sea and the mother looked wistfully seaward at the changes of the keen piping moorland winds' (*SL* 5).[90] Able-bodied men, like Kinraid, were pressed into the King's service for the navy. His impressment blighted not only Sylvia's life but that of Philip too.

Despite Philip's efforts, Sylvia's attempts to create a garden at Haytersbank were doomed 'as she found the bleak sea-winds came up and blighted all endeavours' at cultivation. 'Walled in with rough moorland stones', the garden is a microcosm of Monkshaven in that it is an enclosed space, the life of which is blighted by the sea. (*SL* 231). The failing plants mirror Sylvia, whose vitality disappears after Kinraid's inexplicable disappearance. There is a memorable moment when Philip, having returned from London, encounters Sylvia 'standing' in her garden 'quite motionless ' looking out over the sea (*SL* 231). At this moment, the reader is reminded of the vessels which, from a distance, appear stationary on the 'wide expanse of ocean'. In this narrative pause Gaskell effectively creates a crucial symbolic link which demonstrates that the sea is woven inextricably into their lives. It symbolises Kinraid's presence and just as inexorably as the waves break on the shore so he stands within any relationship Philip and Sylvia might establish.

When Sylvia first catches sight of the sea, it is like a flat pavement of sapphire', (*SL* 14) 'tranquil, trackless and illimitable'. From all land-based perspectives, for instance, the cliff-top at Darley's funeral, Sylvia's perilous but private and contemplative nook on 'the ledge of rocks that faced the blue ocean' (*SL* 106), to Philip's survey of the sea as Kinraid departs on the man o' war and Sylvia's cliff-top rambles, the sea appears to be an unlimited, silent blank expanse of blue water. These seemingly endless vistas resemble both the sweeping moors around Haworth and the moorland that

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[90] **Rural Depopulation** 'The decline in absolute numbers in a given area of countryside'. Goodall, 417. There can be several causes for this movement, in this case it is due to net out-migration of young boys to become fishermen.

encompasses Monkshaven on its landward side. To Gaskell, the vast expanse of open ocean visible from the cliff-tops at Whitby might have seemed as alien and unfamiliar as did the moorlands on first acquaintance. It is possible to imagine an involuntary exclamation equivalent to that provoked by the sight of the Haworth moors, 'Oh! that wild illimitable expanse of ocean, stretching away to infinity and the very realms of calm tranquillity'(*The Life,* 439). This perception of the sea threads its way through the narrative as an apparent reality. Vessels are invariably distant, and move with a 'tranquillity of motion' (*SL* 106) a paradox which signals to the reader that Gaskell is using the sea as symbol because in reality the sea off the coast of Whitby was a busy thoroughfare, especially in the summer months.

At the end of the eighteenth century Whitby was an important shipbuilding and ship owning centre and the 'wealthy magnates' (*SL* 8;1) of the town owned colliers and whaling vessels. The principal collier ownership was located in Whitby which had thirty-eight colliers engaged in this trade in 1815, in addition to a further ninety concerned generally with the 'coasting trade'[91], which involved passengers as well as freight. Like the whaling industry, sea-going traffic was constrained by frequent and unpredictable storms along this inhospitable coast, and plied up and down mostly during the spring and summer months. For instance, the principal East Coast trade in 'sea coal moved only between 10 March and 29 September.'[92] The name 'sea coal' is derived from the trade in coal mined on the Northumberland and Durham coalfield and transported south via the Tyne to the Thames. Its chief source of profit lay in the 'outgoing' journey because the colliers returned only with ballast in the form of Thames gravel and chalk for which there was little remuneration. Collier ownership centralised in Whitby meant that the town levied a tax on goods landed both at Whitby and Newcastle and a 'toll' was charged for traffic passing Whitby. The proceeds from this tax subsidised harbour improvements.[93] At the height of the trade

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[91] Young, vol. II 561.
[92] White 76.
[93] Tindale 12.

about the time the novel was set, Whitby could hold five hundred ships and up to one hundred vessels on one tide alone. According to the 1846 Parliamentary Papers, six hundred ships are said to have passed Whitby in one day alone.[94]

Although at the beginning of the novel, Gaskell depicts 'scores of white-sailed fishing boats'[95] on this 'tranquil limitless expanse', they are 'apparently motionless'. In this picture there is no sense of the commercialism of Monkshaven's seaboard, which was the reality of the time about which she was writing and had continued up to the time she visited. Consequently, it is unlikely that the sea was devoid of shipping when Gaskell went to Whitby in 1859, for two reasons. First, although during the time of year that Gaskell visited Whitby, there would have been less maritime traffic as it was outside the busiest season, and secondly, the function of Whitby was shifting to recreation, which might suggest a reduction in the number of ships in and around the port. However, White suggests that this development was taking place alongside the traditional economic activities so there may not have been a noticeable decline in shipping as a result.[96] Therefore it is clear that the view she portrays is a highly romanticised, unrealistic one. However, it is deliberate, for Gaskell wishes to depict the sense of unreality associated with Sylvia's relationship with Kinraid.

In contrast to this romantic view are the economic realities of the seasonal whaling industry which generate the narrative drive at the opening of the novel although the bustle of activity is on the land rather than the water. Determined by meteorological constraints, the whalers return from their summer fishing season in Arctic waters in October before the onset of the winter extremes of weather. Despite Easson's observation that Gaskell was incorrect in her dating of their return, Young states that

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94 White 76.

95 The fact that she suggests that the fishing boats are 'white-sailed' is one index of romanticism for many vessels at the time had brown sails. Bill Eglon Shaw, *Frank Meadow Sutcliffe, Photographer* (Whitby: The Sutcliffe Gallery, 1974). Sutcliffe's photographs depict the red-brown sails typical of the later part of the nineteenth century. Turner's watercolour of Whitby (1824) shows plenty of shipping much of which has brown sails.

96 White 108.

the latest date is 8 September;[97] nevertheless, it is the 'great half-yearly traffic' (*SL* 191) of Monkshaven which engenders the narrative's momentum. It creates an interactive dynamism between sea and land from the moment that Molly spots the whaler lying outside the harbour. The return of the whaling fleet causes the overturning of the 'creepie stools' and the abandonment of the weekly market as farmer's wives rush excitedly to the harbour to await the vessel. From the appearance of the market place as Sylvia and Molly arrive, Gaskell makes it clear that economic interaction with the sea takes precedence over the land in that the sale of dairy produce is forgotten with the advent of the fishermen. Similarly, the almost tangible, noisy, bustling movement which accompanies the preparations for the fleet's departure in March not only maintains the momentum of the story but emphasises the town's economic dependence upon the sea:

> Every blacksmith's shop rung with the rhythmical clang of busy hammers, beating out old iron, such as horseshoes, nails or stubs, into great harpoons; the quays were thronged with busy and important sailors, rushing hither and thither, conscious of the demand in which they were held at this season of the year[...] The shops [...] were equally busy;stores had to be purchased by the whaling masters ..warm clothing of all sorts had to be provided[...], another impetus given to business when the whalers returned in the autumn, and the men were flush of money.' (*SL* 190-191)

Superimposed on these economic realities are the activities of the press gangs. By 1793, 'the proceedings of the French had set Europe on fire' (*SL* 5) and the Napoleonic Wars were underway. However, all that the press gangs had done in Monkshaven by the beginning of the novel 'was to lounge about at the Randyvowse' (*SL* 10) but this was to change with the return of the fleet. By the accounts told, on the first appearance of the whalers the local press gang attacked two whalers, arrested four men and killed Darley, a Whitby man. This tyranny of 'impressment' not only draws this physically enclosed port into national affairs of state but is also inseparable from

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[97] Easson, *Elizabeth Gaskell* 167.

the seasonal rhythms of the whaling industry. The press gangs actions 'blight' the happy occasions:

> Instead of its being the annual time of rejoicing and feasting; of gladdened households,[...] of unlimited and reckless expenditure and boisterous joviality, [...] crowded public-houses and crowded staithes [...] the period of their return was full of gloomy anxiety, [...] Indeed, all along the coast of Yorkshire, it seemed as if a blight hung over the land and people [...] as men went stealthily by back lanes to their work and were fearful of every approaching footstep.(*SL* 249-50)

Such was the taste of impressment. As well as affecting the whole town, individual's lives were affected by the blight of this brutal activity. Sylvia's life was more affected than most as her lover disappeared due to the deceptive actions of the gangs. Subsequently they deceived the townspeople of Monkshaven by ringing the fire bell in order to arrest able bodied sailors for the King's Service. Their action incites Daniel to riot and rebellion for which he is tried and hanged. Just as Sylvia's potential for passion had lain latent until Kinraid's arrival, so Daniel eventually vented his 'pent-up feelings of passionate antagonism against the press gangs which he expressed initially in Chapter V of the first volume of the story. Sanders considers that 'Daniel Robson is one of Elizabeth Gaskell's most subtle portraits of upright, earnest, simple, if not always likeable, men caught up in circumstances which move beyond their control.'[98] The implication of Sanders' statement is that Daniel was not entirely master of his own destiny, for although he instigated the uprising, he lacked the imaginative powers to envisage its tragic and ultimately fatal outcome. Therefore Daniel fits perfectly with the deterministic philosophy propounded by Gaskell throughout her work that human destiny is the result of environmental factors in conjunction with human nature and aided by chance and circumstance.

The tumultuous events linked with the sea and the course of the war with France not only propel the narrative forward but also link the sea to Haytersbank. Daniel's death sealed the fate of Haytersbank as Sylvia, unable to manage a farm which has so

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[98] Sanders, introduction, *Sylvia's Lovers* xii.

much arable land, and her mother are forced to abandon the farm and move to Monkshaven.

Given these circumstances, Sylvia bows to the inevitable, marries Philip, and endures life within the confines of the house behind Foster's shop, although memories of Haytersbank remain at the forefront of her mind. Wright acknowledges the sense of 'entrapment' but considers that Sylvia is faced with a choice of whether or not she marries Philip. That may be true up to a point but due to the 'context of restriction, necessity, and a sense of indebtedness,'[99] she was not in control of her own destiny at this moment in the drama. Her inability to farm the land, her mother's needs, her ignorance of Kinraid's fate and Philip's overwhelming but unswerving loyalty left her little choice but to marry Philip. However, the sea continues as a powerful force in her life. She is constantly attracted to the cliff-top, because as far as Sylvia is concerned her love for Kinraid is inextricably linked with the sea. Paradoxically, for all the seeming limitless tranquillity, in reality the sea brings nothing but emotional turmoil and tragedy through its economic ties with the land, its whaling fleets, the press gangs and Kinraid. Thus Gaskell's use of subtle irony reinforces one of the novel's themes, that appearance belies reality. There is a double bluff here because not only does the calm belie the reality of busy shipping lanes and successful economic activity but it also belies the turmoil and tragedy for those on the land.

From the foregoing discussion it can be seen that the novel's spatial units are intricately interwoven. However, it is the 'constant interaction of sea and land' that, for Sanders, is 'the completely fresh idea of the novel'.[100] The intention of the subsequent discussion is to take his argument further by demonstrating that moments of dramatic tension and pivotal moments of the plot are enacted, the narrative is driven forward and fates are determined within the littoral zone. This area can be defined as 'the zone between high-and low-water spring tides', in other words, 'that

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[99]Wright, '*We are not angels*' 168.

[100] Sanders, introduction, *Sylvia's Lovers* vii.

area of the shoreline which is in juxtaposition to a body of water.'[101] It will be argued that for Gaskell the choice of locating the narrative dynamics within the interactive contact zone where the sea meets the land underlined the spatial foundations of the narrative structure.

NARRATIVE DRIVE AND NARRATIVE TENSION: The Littoral Zone

The Arrival of the Whaling Fleet.

However imaginative Gaskell may have been with the topography of Monkshaven and its surrounding area, she was meticulous in her use of the coastal topography in order to render authentic several pivotal moments in the plot. At the same, interwoven into these scenes is the thematic current that appearance belies reality.

From Sylvia's first sight of the sea 'which lay beyond' the town, the narrative begins the ascent to its climax. This pivotal moment introduces the 'watery wildscape' which is to play a crucial role in determining either directly, or indirectly, the fate of a number of characters. Aware of the 'paramount interest' (*SL* 14) attached to whaling vessels, Sylvia became infected with Molly's excitement as she recognised the vessel as the first whaler home for the winter. As they run down into Monkshaven, Sylvia is running to confront a new influence in her life, that of Kinraid. Through his presence in the novel, the hinterland of Monkshaven is extended to include both the Northern Arctic waters and the southern Mediterranean, and Sylvia is to be offered a choice between the freedom represented by Kinraid's peripatetic maritime profession and the imprisonment of Philip's confined life of self-restraint in Monkshaven. Having arrived breathless in the town, they make their way to the quayside to join the eagerly waiting crowd.[102] The dramatic tension derives from the wait. It is necessitated by the ' lashing, leaping tide' (*SL* 19) which meets the 'rapid rushing waters of the Dee from the snow-fed springs high on the moorland above'(*SL* 166). The point at which they meet is the entrance to the harbour. The distinctive topographical feature known as

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[101] Whittow, *Dictionary of Physical Geography* 315.

[102] According to records, the cliffs would have been lined with wives and sweethearts watching for their return.' Tindale 22.

'the bar', (*SL* 27) is formed at 'the point of deposition of sand and silt at the meeting of tidal and fresh waters.' (See Fig. 5.6)[103] Thus it is an area of shallow water over which the tide must rise before vessels can gain access to the port. East considers that the bar 'is a ledge of alum shale covered with sand' the position of which, in White's opinion, is related to the shape and length of the piers 'which must have influenced the location of the bar'.[104] These have been extended since the time of the novel but it seems reasonable to assume that the shallow water is the result of both the ledge of resistant rock and depositional processes which occur as the result of the convergence of river and sea current action at the mouth of the harbour. Dramatically, the bar holds a pivotal role in the narrative. Molly first spots the whaling vessel at three o'clock, and high tide is not until five o' clock.

Although there is no great hurry, their excitement creates a change of pace and atmosphere, for having dawdled, the girls went, 'down the [...] hill at a pace that was almost a run' (*SL* 14).

However, the vessel was not able to cross the bar until high tide when the water would rise to a maximum of fifteen feet.[105] Whilst it waited, the ship would have been anchored in the 'Whitby Roads' which is an area of deeper water to the west of the harbour.(See Fig. 5.6) The vessel's apparently stationary position created dramatic tension in the narrative. One of those who waited expectantly interrogated Molly, 'May I be so bold as to ax if t' Crooked Negro is covered yet?' (*SL* 18) Molly is depicted as standing on tip-toe to see 'the black stone so named' because of the crowds in front of her, 'but Sylvia, stooping and peeping through the glimpses afforded between the arms of the moving people, saw it first and told the blind man that it was still above water'(*SL* 18). To date no edition of the novel contains an explanation of

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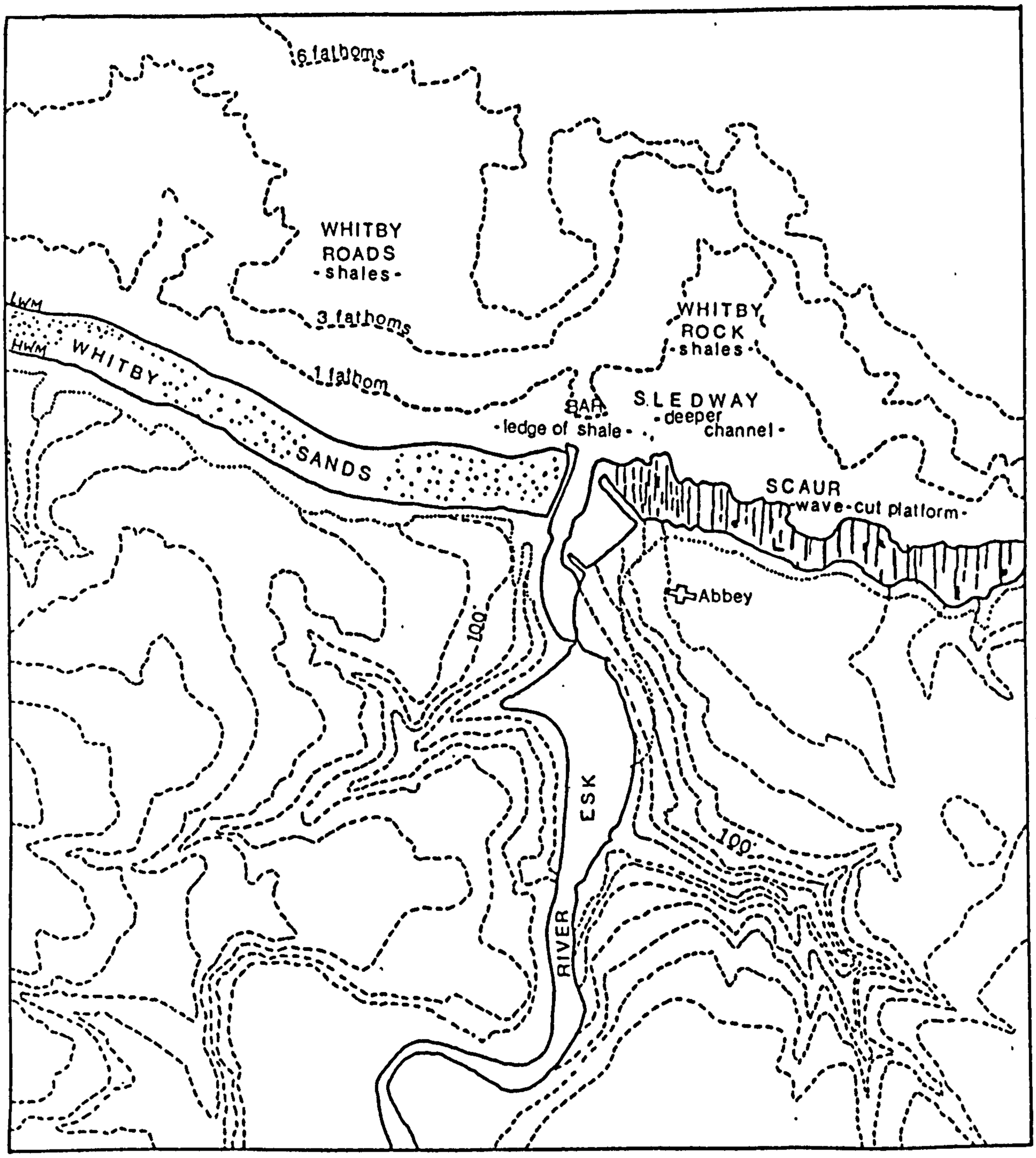
[103] White, letter to the author, 2 Dec. 1995

[104] East 488; White, letter to the author, 2 Dec. 1995.

[105] This is the height of a spring tide whereas neap tides which are lower produce only an eleven and a half foot depth of water. East 485; Young, Vol. II 539.



1. WHITBY ROADS- *deeper water where the Resolution anchored whilst waiting for the rising tide*
2. WHITBY SANDS- site of constructive waves
3. CLIFF TOP- *site of Bella's rescue after a freak wave snatched her from the newly cut cliff path*
4. BAR – *possible candidate for the 'Crooked Negro'*
5. WHITBY ROCKS- " "
6. SLEDWAY- narrow channel- *route taken by Kinraid's smack on a short cut to the harbour*
7. THE SCAUR- *rocks on which Kinraid's smack founders*

Fig. 5.6 The Coastal Topography of Monkshaven
Source: Adapted from G.H.J.Daysh *A Survey of Whitby* (Windsor: Shakespeare Head, 1958) 33

what seems to be a local colloquialism for an offshore topographical feature associated with the arrival of whaling ships. It might seem that the 'crooked Negro' is a reference to the bar that vessels had to cross in order to gain access to the harbour. However, White considers the term itself is a product of Gaskell's imagination, although he acknowledges that 'it could have come from a piece of oral tradition', the inspirational source favoured by this author. In terms of the coastal topography, he argues that:

> In the context it seems to be visible, which the bar hardly ever is except in freak conditions. Much more likely, is that it (the Crooked Negro) represents the steep outer ledges of the Whitby Rock, which extends well to the north of the east pier and are exposed at low tide. The sea breaks over these with considerable force, and being wet and made up of Liassic shale they show up as black. This would be easily visible from a number of viewpoints in the town. (See Fig.5.6)[106]

Whilst researching the novel Gaskell consulted Admiralty charts so it is probable that she would have been aware of the local coastal topography and the navigational hazards, although it is possible in the light of this evidence that Gaskell may have confused or amalgamated the Whitby Rock with the bar, having seen the strata of black rock outcropping during her visit.[107] However, the term 'Crooked Negro' refers to a 'black stone' which seems to indicate an single outcrop of rock with limited aerial extent rather than the ledges of shales suggested by White. Whatever Gaskell intended by the use of the term 'Crooked Negro', it is clear that she was using the offshore topographical constraints to create dramatic tension, for until the water level rose either over outcropping rocks and the sandy bar, the harbour was not accessible and

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[106] White, letter to the author, 2 Dec.1995. The quoted views in this discussion originate in response to a series of questions specifically upon the topography of *Sylvia's Lovers.* Correspondence with Harold Brown of the Whitby Literary and Philosophical Society endorses Andrew White's view that Gaskell invented the name 'Crooked Negro'. Harold Brown, letter to the author, 21 Nov. 1995. However he drew the author's attention to the buoy which denotes the position of the hazardous outcrop of Whitby Rock and provided a source for this information. Richard Weatherill, *The Ancient Port of Whitby and its Shipping* (Whitby: Horne, 1908) 15. It should also be noted that within these Liassic rocks are strata of black laminated shales known as 'Jet Rock' which could account for the colour of the exposed rock. Hemingway 14.

[107] She would have been familiar with such charts through her Stevenson relatives and may have been accustomed to studying them. She certainly made use of the Annual Register for this novel and she had 'so many people at work for her in Yorkshire'. *Letters* 603.

the whalers could not go ashore. In the meantime, the crowd waited excitedly and expectantly.

As the white sailed ship lies at anchor outside the harbour it is effectively stationary. However, the 'lashing leaping incoming tide' cause the vessel to rock making it appear 'alive with eagerness' (*SL* 19). The personification of the vessel symbolises those who wait on the quayside, thus Gaskell is creating an image to symbolise the interactive environments of land and sea. She creates a scene of suspense, anticipation and dramatic tension enabling the reader to share the emotional experience as well as the visual picture. In the dramatic pause caused by the wait, a rhetorical reflection by the narrator indicates the perils of Arctic waters whilst raising the dramatic temperature of the scene by penetrating the minds of those who wait.

> How impatient her crew of beating hearts were for that moment (for her anchors to be heaved) how those on land sickened at the suspense, may be imagined, when you remember that for six long summer months those sailors had been as if dead from all the news of those they loved; shut up in terrible, dreary Arctic seas [...] . No one knew what might have happened. The crowd on shore grew silent and solemn before the dread of the possible news of death that might toll in upon their hearts with this uprising tide. (*SL* 19).

In this passage Gaskell creates the appearance of a hazardous environment which can cause death amongst the whaling crews. Although the reader is not aware of the irony, the sailors' destinies lie not at the mercy of nature in the form of the wild uncontrollable sea but in the hands of the press gang who emerge from the sea by boat to apprehend those either aboard ship or on the land. Thus Gaskell is creating a gulf between appearance and reality of which the reader is not aware at this point in the narrative.

As knowledge of the press gangs' actions spreads amongst those who wait, the mood of the crowd changes dramatically and they surge through the town on a wave of movement from the quayside to the 'Randyvowse'. At the same time, crying and imprecations rise from the people,

> the vanguard of the crowd [...] consisted of wild, half-amphibious boys, slowly moving backwards, as they were compelled by the pressure of the

> coming multitude to go on, [...] women crying aloud, [...] showering down abuse [...] . Their wild, famished eyes were strained [...] lips now tightly drawn back so as to show the teeth with the unconscious action of an enraged wild animal, [...] .
> The stormy multitude swelled into the market-place [...]. A low deep growl went up from the dense mass. (*SL* 28-29)

Gaskell skilfully and ironically interweaves two parallel images of the sea and wild animals to convey the sense that the crowd's nature is an uncontrollable element. The press gangs' actions have provoked a passionate response in these 'wild north eastern people' (*SL* 71) who will not submit to the oppression of the press warrants. [108] It is the transfer of the word 'wild' to the people which is the image linking land to sea as it is the latter which might more appropriately be seen as the wild, uncontrollable element. The crowd who can recognise wild, passionate love, and Sylvia who wanted spontaneously wanted to go into t' thick of it and do a bit of help' (*SL* 28), provide a contrast with Philip who feels constrained by the law. He exhorts her, 'Sylvie! you must not. Don't be silly; its the law and no one can do aught against it' (*SL* 28). These circumstances encapsulate the fundamental difference between the two characters. Philip, deeply embedded in the confines of Monkshaven, cannot operate outside its social mores whereas Sylvia, seduced by the romanticism attached to the sea, is prepared to abandon her personal safety for the freedom and spontaneity of the moment.

Kinraid's Impressment.

The second pivotal moment in the narrative takes place on the beach to the west of the town.[109] The press gang's ambush of Kinraid is an act of deception, which occurs at the mouth of one of the gullies which dissect this stretch of coastline. (See Fig.5.7)

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[108] There are parallels here with Gaskell's use of the word 'wild' to describe the inhabitants of West Yorkshire in Chapter II of *The Life of Charlotte Brontë.* They possess 'wild rough heathen ways' and exhibit characteristics of 'strange eccentricity' and 'wild strength of will'. *The Life* 25; 22.

[109] A beach can be defined as 'the littoral environment at the junction of the land and sea'. Whittow, 57.

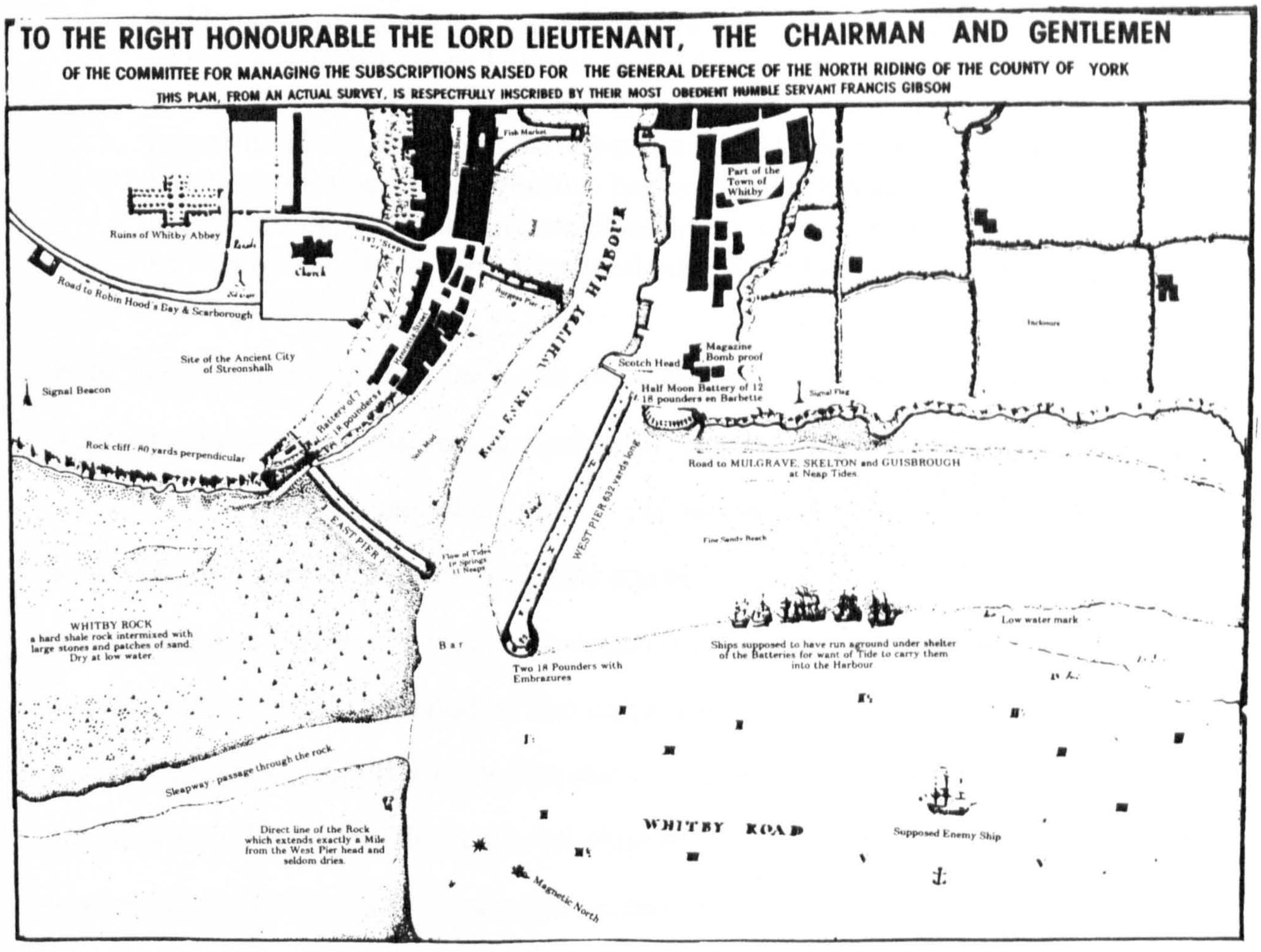

Fig. 5.7 Philip's route to London

Source: 'Observations on the Port and Town of Whitby annexed to a plan of the coast, 1794. John Tindale *Fishing out of Whitby* (Clapham, Lancaster: Dalesman, 1987) 6

Coincidentally, Philip is walking along the road which follows the beach at the cliff foot on his way to London. Like the accurate navigational topography associated with the bar of Monkshaven harbour, Gaskell appears familiar with this section of coastline. Although much of today's cliff line is reinforced by coastal defences, research suggests that her description of the cliffs was accurate:[110]

> To his left were the cliffs rising one behind another, having deep gullies here and there between, with long green slopes upward from the land, and then

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[110] From the geomorphological description of the cliff line and the site of Haytersbank farm, , the gully would seem to lie fairly close to Monkshaven. However, Gaskell's reference to distance within the novel creates ambiguity. 'For seven or eight miles the level sands were as short and far more agreeable a road than the up and down land-ways.' (*SL* 212). To what extent this was a reference to the length of the road towards Hartlepool which followed the sands, or whether it meant that the ambush took place at this distance from Monkshaven, is difficult to determine from the text. The nearest gully to the possible location of Haytersbank along the western cliff is about two miles from Monkshaven. However there are two more at Sandsend (three miles away) and several more beyond. Whilst the topography is precise, the geography is not. Fig. 5.5 attempts to map a coherent literary topography. As Gaskell was unfamiliar with this area and did not use a map, the inexactitude is explicable.

> sudden falls of brown and red soil or rock deepening to a yet greater richness of colour at their base [...] . So he trudged on merrily over the first mile or so; [...] not a creature to be seen since he had left the little gathering of bare-legged urchins dabbling in the sea-pools near Monkshaven. The cares of the land were shut out by the glorious barrier of rocks before him. There were some great masses that had been detached by the action of the weather and lay half-embedded in the sand, draperied over by the heavy pendant olive-green seaweed. (*SL* 213)

With 'intertidal pools' at their base, the cliffs, about 30' high, are composed of non-resistant yellow-grey sandstones and pale grey silts and clays. Subject to marine erosion at their base at a rate of about 0.75' per annum, sub-aerial weathering from above and dissected by streams, Gaskell's precisely accurate description of cliffs rising behind one another, with blocks strewn at the foot of the cliffs indicates careful documentary research supported by first hand experience of these cliffs. In the short periods of good weather during her ten day visit to Whitby, it seems likely that she would have walked along the beach and observed the geomorphological and topographical niceties of this coastal environment. The 'great masses' of rock (*SL* 213) detached by processes of mass movement and marine erosion are of dramatic importance as they provided Philip with cover as Kinraid came down Haytersbank Gully on to the beach ahead of him.[111] The dramatic tension is raised as Philip's progress along the beach is hampered by the rocks as he is determined to keep Kinraid in view. Although the reader has no inkling of what is to happen, he/she shares Philip's knowledge that Kinraid has just left Sylvia; thus Gaskell maintains the dramatic tension as Philip continues his clambering:

> After a while he climbed up a few feet, so as to mingle his form yet more completely with the stones and rocks around. Stumbling over the uneven and often jagged points, slipping on the sea-weed [...] he kept his eyes fixed [...] on Kinraid. (*SL* 214)

Narrative continuity is maintained as Gaskell uses the realities of the coastal topography to drive the narrative forward. Symbolically it is used to express the

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[111] Hemingway describes the sub-aerial weathering of the boulder clay which produces an irregular cliff-face and 'slipped debris of large arcuate unaltered blocks which may rise to 50' above the cliff foot.' Hemingway 39.

thematic content of the novel. To Philip, the physical barrier of the cliffs 'shut out' Monkshaven just as the town appears to shut him in from the outside world, so these physical features represent emotional barriers. Philip keeps his emotions under strict control when in Monkshaven: however, beyond the town, he allows himself greater freedom of expression and as he begins his walk by the sea to Hartlepool he feels a sense of the liberation associated with the sea throughout the novel. Gaskell uses the word 'elastic', (*SL* 212; 3) (an image repeated in connection with the moorland to symbolise physical and emotional freedom) to contrast with Philip's usual 'pent-up' emotional state when incarcerated in the working environment of Monkshaven. In order to gain access to the sea, Kinraid took advantage of the natural break in the cliff-line as a means of access to the beach and his route to join his whaler after he left Haytersbank. For him, the gully forms a physical and symbolic link between his life at sea and his emotional life which is focused upon Sylvia. Ironically though, using the gully as a cover, the press gang ambush Kinraid as Philip remains concealed behind eroded rocks at the cliff base. When he is securely tied up, Kinraid catches sight of Philip and entrusts him with a message of loyalty for Sylvia as he is carried away by the gang. Philip fails to convey the message to Sylvia and whilst deceiving both her, and Kinraid in his absence, Philip is guilty of self-deception. He attempts to convince himself that he was not in reality the recipient of the message and had not been heard by Kinraid when he had made his promise to pass on the message. At the moment that Philip responded to Kinraid's 'adjuration', Carter, one of the press gang had spoken (*SL* 221).

Until this moment Gaskell leaves the interpretation of Philip's motives to the reader. However, she is unable to resist an observation to steer the narrative: 'And then the dread Inner Creature, who lurks in each of our hearts, arose and said, 'It is as well: a promise given is a fetter to the giver. But a promise is not given when it has not been received' (*SL* 221).

Philip's self-deception culminates in a sense of unreality as, watching the boat with Kinraid aboard, he has a nightmarish sensation in case Kinraid fails to reach his

destination. The ship to which Kinraid is bound is 'standing out to sea' (*SL* 222). This image of stationary vessels on a motionless sea is sustained throughout the novel as a constant reminder of Gaskell's irony because, of course, the sea and its shipping is one of the means and causes of movement and emotional disturbance in the novel. At the moment of his impressment it might have appeared to the reader that Kinraid's fate was sealed. However, he turned the enforced recruitment to his own advantage by promotion through the ranks to become a King's Officer in the navy. Although it may appear that Kinraid, free from the environmental constraints of Monkshaven was master of his own destiny, even he was subject to the vagaries of the weather and the capriciousness of the sea. When returning to Monkshaven his vessel was caught in a violent storm and his rescue was another of the dramatic pivotal events in the novel to be enacted within the littoral zone.

Kinraid's Return and Rescue.

Unknown to Sylvia, Kinraid departs dramatically from the littoral zone on the 'blue rippling ocean' which 'glitters in the sunlight' (*SL* 222) and returns in an equally dramatic way to a more hazardous rocky part of the coast during a storm. Having left the house after a disagreement with Philip, Sylvia walks up to the eastern cliff-top, an unusual direction for her to go (Gaskell included the correct orientation on this occasion). The cliffs are higher to the east of the town and have receded over time, leaving a wide wave-cut platform of rock exposed at low tide at their foot.[112] This outcrop of shales which is not concealed beneath a covering of beach material, as are many platforms, is a well-known landform known locally as 'The Scaur.' (See Fig.5.6) Hazardous to shipping, it is covered with only shallow water at low tide and even at high tide ships can run aground on this spot. The prevailing stormy conditions meant that the tide was running high with high-energy, destructive waves breaking over the

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[112] The cliffs to the east are 200' high and 150' to the west of the mouth of the Esk. These heights can be clearly seen from the contour lines on the *Yorkshire,* map Sheet 32 *Six inches to one mile* (Southampton: Ordnance Map Office, 1853). In contrast, to the east there is a wide expanse of sand on the western side of the river mouth.

Scaur. As Sylvia approached the place where there was a cove at the cliff base[113], she encountered 'wild excitement' (*SL* 370) as a group of fisher families were struggling to haul in a smack foundering on the rocks. The reader knows that in order to take a shorter route the captain was trying to 'negotiate the inner channel' which could be treacherous because of a 'line of sunken rocks' (*SL* 371). The inner channel is known as The Sledway and is a narrow channel of deeper water caused by a geological fault. Positioned between the Scaur and the Whitby Rock, The Sledway is a treacherous shelf of shale projecting well out to sea with bands of jet in it. The narrow channel is navigable only when the wind is blowing from the south-south east or east.[114] It seems that Gaskell is aware of this fact, as in her description of the scene she refers to an offshore wind which, according to the orientation of the coast and the time of day, would be correct.[115]

> The vessel strained to get free of the strong guiding cable; the tide was turning the wind was blowing offshore and Sylvia knew without being told, that almost parallel to this was a line of sunken rocks that had been fatal to many a ship before now, if she has tried to take the inner channel instead of keeping out to sea for miles, and then steering straight for Monkshaven port [...] . Sylvia learnt that the vessel was supposed to be a Newcastle smack sailing from London that had taken the dangerous inner channel to save time. (*SL* 370-371)

Although such attention to topographic detail and its accuracy can be verified by reference to the map of the offshore area (see fig:5.6), more importantly it enabled Gaskell to evoke a convincing scene which carries symbolic overtones. Once again in this scene Gaskell transferred the word 'wild' which appropriately describes from the state of the sea to the emotional status of the local people who are attempting to

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113 Gaskell names this 'Headlington Cove', (*SL* 369) a feature which has a fictitious name, and is located at some non-specified distance along the foot of the eastern cliff-face.

114 White 29.

115 It is notable that all these topographical and meteorological details are correct. Local land and sea breezes operate in relation to atmospheric pressure. At night, the land cools more quickly than the sea therefore pressure remains high. As a result the air moves off the land onto the sea as an off-shore wind or 'land-breeze'. A good account can be found in David Briggs and Peter Smithson, *Fundamentals of Physical Geography* (London: Hyman, 1985) 149-150.

rescue the smack. It is they, not the sea, who will determine Kinraid's immediate fate. Although ignorant of this, Sylvia's 'principal feeling was one of gladness and high rejoicing that they were saved who had been so near death not half an hour before' (*SL* 371). There is a double irony here, for although the rescue heralds Kinraid's return and the rejoicing would seem to be appropriate, in fact his arrival brings tragedy to the lives of Sylvia and Philip through the revelation of Philip's deception. In the tumult which follows, Kinraid leaves again hurriedly when he discovers that Sylvia is married, and immediately Philip departs on his self-imposed exile. The high-energy waves which almost destroy Kinraid as he approaches Monkshaven symbolise the destruction of the relationships between Sylvia and her 'lovers'. Gaskell uses accurate geography, topography and meteorology to create a realistic scene. Into this authentic picture she builds symbolism to express theme. The offshore winds may generate destructive and potentially fatal waves, but at the same time she is conveying the message that human failing, in conjunction with circumstances determined by the natural environment, can destroy relationships and ultimately determine the fate of the characters.

Bella's Rescue from the waves.

Events which are located in the topographically precise littoral zone continue to drive the narrative forward to the close of the novel. The destructive waves of the storm which almost destroy Kinraid foreshadow Philip's eventual death. Although the reader is not privy to this dramatic event, for it is narrated by Kester, Philip dies as the result of his attempt to rescue his daughter from drowning:

> 'T' little un had gone for a walk wi' Jeremiah Foster, an' he were drawn for to go round t' edge o' t' cliff, wheere they's makin' t' new walk reet o'er t'sea'. [...] Some one said as they passed t' man a-sittin' on a bit on a rock up above [...] a only know as a heared a great fearful screech i't' air [...] an' a ran out, an' a looked, an' just on t' walk, at t' turn, was t' swish of a wave runnin' back as quick as t' mischief int' t' sea.' (*SL* 491-492)

The cliff-side pathway appears to have been within reach of 'the hungry waves which lashed themselves into high ascending spray' (*SL* 494) which Sylvia could observe

from Widow Dobson's cottage. By the time that Gaskell visited Whitby in 1859 the West Cliff had undergone resort development, which included a promenade on the cliff-top and paths along the cliff-side. On this side of Whitby, the cliffs which are about 150 feet high at this point are fronted by a wide expanse of sandy beach known as the Whitby sands.[116] On the 1853 map, the high tide line is labelled as the High Water Mark of Ordinary Spring tides and is found at the foot of the cliff indicating that they are undergoing active erosion.[117] Therefore it is possible a wave could have snatched a small child off the new path under construction round the base of the cliff. (See Figs. 5.4 and 5.6)[118]

However, as the tide comes in the waves breaking on this wide expanse of sandy beach would be low energy or constructive waves. They break much less frequently than high energy or destructive waves, at a rate of seven per minute[119] but with unceasing regularity to listener and observer alike. Given the inclement weather experienced by Gaskell during her stay it is possible that she was more aware of high energy waves along this section of coast and it was these which provided the inspiration for the accident. Imaginative elements mingle with precise and less precise topography in the latter section of the novel when the mid-nineteenth-century Whitby seems to colour and influence the picture of late eighteenth-century Monkshaven discussed earlier. At the same time however, the interaction of sea and land drives the narrative towards the tragic finale of Philip's eventual death by accidental events within the natural environment of Monkshaven's littoral zone.

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[116] Hemingway 40.

[117] *Yorkshire,* map 1853.

[118] The cliff-paths seem to be well above the HWM judging by the map of the 1850's reproduced in White 62.

[119] **Waves.** A wave is a circular movement of water. Once the depth becomes too shallow to support the circle, the wave breaks. Low-energy or constructive waves break at a rate of seven per minute and are responsible for beach building as the swash of the breaker deposits more than the backwash removes. High energy or destructive waves break at a rate of between thirteen and fifteen per minute; they are high in relation to their length and are responsible for erosion of beaches and cliffs. High energy waves characterised the storm from which Kinraid was rescued and an imaginary single freak wave seems to have been responsible for Bella's accident. The waves which can be heard at Darley's funeral and which lap unceasingly at the end of the novel are appropriately constructive waves. Whittow, 142; 113.

CONCLUSION

The story begins with Kinraid's advent from the sea with the whaling fleet. His appearance awakens a latent passion for freedom in Sylvia and releases Philip's equally passionate emotions which are pent-up within the confines of Monkshaven. The latter's love for Sylvia amounts to idolatry and his passionate response to the whaler and incomer, Kinraid, grew out of this misplaced emotion. The drama of this love-triangle, enacted within the appropriate environmental triangle of one town and its rural and littoral hinterlands lead to irrevocable actions which have tragic consequences. Structurally, the central organising principle of *Sylvia's Lovers* is these three spatial spheres of town, farm and 'wildscape'. Whilst realistically evoked, they are also topographically manipulated by Gaskell's imaginative powers and unfamiliarity with Whitby. They carry heavy symbolic overtones, are interlinked by events, economic and social relationships, the movement of the characters, and they play a significant role in determining destiny. Beyond Monkshaven lies the wider, real world but it is glimpsed rather than minutely observed and the connections via character movement are incomplete. Therefore the narrative structure which is tight around the node of Monkshaven becomes loosened on the wider geographical canvas to the point where some critics complain that the Mediterranean location lacks the realism expected of this writer. This may be in part due to her lack of personal experience of the place and her authorial control over the narrative dynamics so that the structural links of character movement are lacking.

Interwoven into her fundamentally nodal narrative structure are the two borderland 'wildscapes' of moorland and sea characterised by treelessness and illimitability. They haunt the novel even when they are not the scenes of action. Of the two, the sea dominates, as it is a constant presence in the novel, realistically, symbolically, thematically and deterministically. The inextricable link between land and sea is made through diction as in the use of the word 'wild' which is used with reference to

character and land-and sea-scape.[120] For her literary purposes Gaskell transferred the epithet to Sylvia, Philip, and the crowd who greeted the returning whalers, in order to reinforce the narrative and deterministic link between land and sea. For instance, the word 'wild' is used to depict both Philip and Sylvia's response to moments of emotional turmoil, and the image of Sylvia as an untamed animal seeking freedom from a future with Philip and the captivity of Monkshaven is sustained as their relationship begins to develop in the chapter appropriately entitled 'Visions of the Future.' (Volume 1, Chapter XI, 117-130, 128) It is important to note that, whatever the literary and artistic justification for the use of the word 'wild', it was Gaskell's own perception of this unfamiliar and somewhat alien northern environment and its people. The discussion of the role of the sea in this novel has revealed a similarity with her treatment of the mountain landscape in *Ruth.* The sea serves two purposes: first, its 'illimitable' horizons are symbolic of Sylvia's unending passion for Kinraid, whose advent in her life was determined by the economic rhythms associated with the sea; secondly, the events which take place in the contact zone are realistic, deterministic and symbolise the resolution of the triangular relationship.

By the closing pages of the novel, the predominant sound of the sea is in the form of low energy, constructive waves of the littoral zone 'lapping..gently..on the shelving shore' which accompanies the tragic finale of Philip's dying hours. The gentle musicality of this repeated coda with its slight variations represents the hope of reconciliation.[121] Sylvia reaches Philip's death bed having forgiven him. The 'ceaseless waves' which symbolically accompany their reconciliation represent the Christian hope which pervades Gaskell's thinking. She is suggesting that the couple will be united in death. The symbolic lapping waves and the moment in the final scene when Philip, 'with one strong effort [...] rose up and turned so as once more to see his wife's pale face of misery and cried [...] 'In heaven,' (*SL* 500) imply that

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[120] Appendix III 444.

[121] Enid Duthie, *The Themes of Elizabeth Gaskell* (New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1980) 31. Duthie uses a musical analogy for the 'requiem' for Philip's gradual death.

Gaskell's message is that the hope of eternal life, symbolised by the sea, transcends human actions on earth, a view expounded by Duthie.[122] However, on another level, there is an argument to be made for environmental determinism. Philip's character, which was formed in the physically enclosed and socially limited atmosphere of Monkshaven, determined his deceitful act of betrayal. The sea took its revenge and can be considered one of the determinants of Philip's fate. However, Sylvia's change of heart to forgive if not forget, allowed her to control her own destiny and to be reconciled with Philip in death so that symbolically, if not realistically, the sea did not destroy the relationship between Philip and his wife. The final message of the novel is one of Christian hope and eternal life, although throughout Gaskell is at pains to convey her belief that environment is one of the determinants of human destiny.

Gaskell only visited Whitby once very briefly and, although she spent most of the ten days out and about seeing the place and talking to local inhabitants, despite inclement weather, her knowledge of the town was limited. However, she attempted to evoke a sense of late eighteenth-century Whitby from her mid-nineteenth-century perspective when there was a shift of economic function underway in the port. Therefore 'to strip away the accretions of the last sixty years and reveal something of the true eighteenth century would be hard. That she succeeded as well as she did is not small tribute to her powers of perception.'[123] White's words not only sum up her achievement but highlight the story's deep but unfamiliar spatial roots.

Having spent nearly a decade steeped in 'wildscapes' it must have been a source of joy to Gaskell to turn to much loved environments for the next major period of fiction writing.

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[122] Duthie 30.

[123] White, letter to the author, 2 Dec. 1995.

CHAPTER 6

RURAL AND PROVINCIAL LANDSCAPES

INTRODUCTION

Although the years from 1854 to 1863 were dominated by 'wildscapes,' throughout her writing career Gaskell shows signs of an innate desire to write about the much loved familiar rural and small town landscapes of her childhood. *Wives and Daughters,* which was to be her final novel, was the one that Gaskell had always wanted to write, but she was constantly torn between compulsion and desire. The moral imperative which had generated Gaskell's early novels of urban-industrial life and the 'fallen woman' originated from her observations of the socio-economic conditions which surrounded her in Manchester. Even as she wrote the introduction to *Mary Barton* she acknowledged the wish to locate her fiction in 'some rural scene' and admitted that she had jettisoned a tale set on the borders of Yorkshire in order to acquaint her readers with the 'romance of those who elbowed her daily in the streets' of Manchester (*MB xxxv*). The springs of innate desire to write about rural landscapes and small town provincial life bubbled up to the surface again[1] whilst her principal literary energy driven by moral compulsion was engaged in the writing of her second novel, *Ruth.*[2] Having been approached by Dickens to contribute to his journal *Household Words* she wrote a number of instalments about a 'dear little town' and its population of 'Amazons'(*C* 1). These stories serialised, in what was ironically a

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[1] This image is derived from Chapple who writes: 'Cranford came bubbling up in fits and starts'. John Chapple, *Elizabeth Gaskell The Early Years* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997) 432.

[2] Siv Jansson 'Elizabeth Gaskell: Writing against the Angel in the House,' *Gaskell Society Journal* 10 (1996): 65-75. Gaskell was driven by a moral imperative but paradoxically wrote against the conventions of the day according to Jansson's reading of *Ruth* for Gaskell made the 'fallen woman', a heroine. This moral compulsion was often accompanied by 'didacticism' that had largely evaporated by the time she wrote *Cousin Phillis* and *Wives and Daughters.* (It was still there to some extent in *My Lady Ludlow.* Wright recognises a 'gradual shift away from the use of authorial commentary.' Edgar Wright, *Mrs Gaskell The Basis for Reassessment* (London: Oxford UP, 1965) 18.

socially conscious journal, later became the book entitled *Cranford.*[3] Together with other short stories and novellas notably, *Mr Harrison's Confessions, A Dark Night's Work, My Lady Ludlow and Cousin Phillis,* this episodic work about a small provincial fictional town named Cranford became the prototype for *Wives and Daughters.*[4]

As the longest and final novel in her oeuvre, *Wives and Daughters* also has the distinction of being unique amongst her major novels for depicting town and countryside before the advent of the railway (some of her short stories like *My Lady Ludlow* are pre-railway). Although *Wives and Daughters* will form the focus for discussion of Gaskell's rural and provincial landscapes, reference will be made to the other works mentioned above when appropriate to the argument.

However it would be a mistake to view the motivation for *Wives and Daughters* as generated solely from within, for towards the end of her writing career Gaskell had been influenced strongly by the recent works of George Eliot and Anthony Trollope. Gaskell 'admired' Eliot's works. She considered the accurate description of the natural scenery of Warwickshire in *Adam Bede* a particular highlight because she could recognise this county which she knew well.(*Letters* 592; 533) A year later, she wished that, 'Mr Trollope would go on writing *Framley Parsonage* for ever' (*Letters* 602). Gaskell adored the seemingly never ending quality of the story, in which, rather like Jane Austen's novels, 'nothing much happens.'[5] Gaskell was to write her own provincial novel which ironically and sadly had the endless quality she never intended. In the letter to George Smith outlining her proposed novel which, she

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[3] Sanders, drew attention to the fact that *Cranford* did not fit easily into the ethos of *Household Words.* Dickens wanted material which raised awareness of deprived social conditions in places like Manchester rather than tales of 'genteel provincial towns'. Andrew Sanders, 'Gaskell's Serials in Context: Working with Dickens', Gaskell Society Meeting , Quaker Meeting House, Euston Road, London, 12 Sept. 1998.

[4] W.J. Keith, *Regions of the Imagination* (Toronto: Toronto UP, 1988) 58. Deirdre D'Albertis, *Dissembling Fictions: Elizabeth Gaskell and the Victorian Social Text* (London: Macmillan, 1997) 137.

[5] Bert G. Hornback, *Middlemarch: A Student's Companion* (Boston: Twayne, 1998) 128.

stated, 'was made up in her mind,' Gaskell makes it clear that place remains the cornerstone of the philosophy which has underpinned her writing from the outset.

> I have made up a story in my mind,—of country town life 40 years ago,— a widowed doctor has one daughter Molly, when she is about 16 he marries again—a widow with one girl Cynthia,—and these two girls—contrasted characters,–not sisters but living as sisters in the same house are unconscious rivals for the love of a young man, Roger Newton, the second son of a neighbouring squire or rather yeoman [...]. (*Letters* 731)

In this synopsis, her starting point is 'country town life' as place precedes, but is intimately connected with, plot, character and theme, confirming the paramount importance that Gaskell attached to the locations which feature in her writing. Banfield, in writing about Jane Austen's artistic methodology, defined 'the influence of place as 'lived experience, the lived reality through which consciousness is developed and character formed.' This seems to epitomise Gaskell's deterministic approach which is endorsed by Lerner in his introduction to *Wives and Daughters.* He writes, 'Like all realists, Gaskell believed that environment forms character' and he continues, 'no novelist would so meticulously create the social medium in which his characters move and have their being if he did not believe it mattered.'[6] It will be argued throughout this section that the narrative structure and drive of all her 'rural' writings are shaped 'from within'[7] by their physical, social and economic geography, and interwoven into this discussion will be the extent to which Gaskell remained faithful to her belief in the role of the environment to shape character and determine destiny. Although in Easson's opinion 'Gaskell's achievement' in *Wives and Daughters* 'is the development of character in a social environment' [8] her authorial interjection that 'fate is a cunning hussy' (*WD* 75) gives the impression that there may be other factors in the equation of human destiny. Wheeler has some sense that this may be the

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[6] Ann Banfield, 'The Influence of Place: Jane Austen and the novel', *Jane Austen: Real and Imagined Worlds,* ed. Oliver McDonagh (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), 35. Lawrence Lerner, introduction *Wives and Daughters* by Elizabeth Gaskell ed. Frank Glover Smith (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973) 26.

[7] Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel1800-1900* (London: Verso, 1998) 70.

[8] Angus Easson, introduction, *Wives and Daughters* by Elizabeth Gaskell (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987) xvii.

case in *Wives and Daughters*, for he entitles his paper, 'An environment of circumstances', a paradoxical title which recognises in Gaskell's final novel a deterministic view of destiny tempered by an awareness of chance, circumstance, coincidence, and one determined partly by character and temperament. D'Albertis certainly concurs with this view for she writes of the 'anarchic influence of 'chance' destiny in her criticism of Gaskell's final novel.[9] Throughout the chapter this issue of the determining factors of human destiny will be kept under review.

TOPOGRAPHICAL SECURITY

The Topographical Jigsaw.

To the reader who had followed and enjoyed Gaskell's writing throughout the 1850's and early 1860's and awaited her new novel with the expectant enthusiasm that Gaskell herself had awaited novels by George Eliot, there must have been a surprise in store. Gone were the townscapes of the industrial north and the high, vast, treeless sweeps of 'wild' moorland and extensive seascapes of her previous works, the portrayal of which necessitated so much frenetic activity in visiting unfamiliar places and writing hundreds of letters. Instead, Gaskell plumbed the depths of her own knowledge and experience to create an intimate, well-wooded, lowland landscape with enclosed, hedge-bound fields, scattered farms, villages, country estates and provincial towns whilst, at times, 'geographically remote' [10] from these locations, as in the case of *Wives and Daughters*. Instead of extensive factual research, the 'Knutsford based stories'[11] depend solely upon a process Chapple termed 'creative recollection'[12] in which Gaskell selected, manipulated and amalgamated[13] familiar

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[9] Michael Wheeler, 'An environment of circumstances,' *English Fiction of the Victorian Period, 1830-1890* (Harlow: Longman, 1985) 68. D'Albertis 158.

[10] Jenny Uglow, *Elizabeth Gaskell: A Habit of Stories* (London: Faber and Faber, 1993) 571.

[11] Edgar Wright, introduction, *My Lady Ludlow and other stories* by Elizabeth Gaskell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) xiii.

[12] The idea for the term came from John Chapple's introduction to his biography. He writes: 'these glimpses (of Knutsford) are Wordsworthian, as much creations as recollections.' I have argued and shall argue in this chapter that the places that appear in her rural works are a combination of creation *and* recollection.(my italics) Chapple, *The Early Years* 1. Luce suggests that Homer's epic poems were topographically precise and 'faithful to reality' rather than 'poetical construction' as he pieces together the topographical jigsaw of Troy and Ithaca-Homer's Greece-as found in the *Iliad* and the

childhood landscapes and localities to create a partly fictional geography and topography suitable for her artistic purposes. Analysis of the constructional methodology of 'creative recollection' is essential to an understanding and appreciation of narrative structures and drives in her 'rural works' for the geography shapes the narrative 'from within'.[14] It is this process which will be discussed in the following sections.

The Cheshire Landscape.

Fictional names disguise what may appear to be recognisable landscapes but, for the most part, Gaskell failed to provide topographical security for her small provincial towns and their rural environs at the beginning of the 'Knutsford based' stories. The quintessentially English lowland landscape of 'quiet pastoralism' (*C* 72), only glimpsed in her earlier short stories, becomes fully developed in *Wives and Daughters,* but its location is not made clear. However, although the reader is left to make the links between fiction and reality for him or herself, there are plenty of clues for those familiar with Cheshire. Gentle undulations, peaceful views of distant hills, woods, fields bounded by high flowering hedgerows and landscaped parkland are the keystones of the landscape around Hollingford. From the disused terraced walk at Hamley Hall, Molly looks out over a 'sunny, peaceful landscape, with trees, and a church spire, two or three red-tiled roofs of old cottages and a purple bit of rising ground in the distance'(*WD* 116) and from her window at Hamley she is able to see 'a flower-garden right below; a meadow of ripe grass just beyond,[...] great old forest-trees a little on one side; and, beyond them again, [...] the silver shimmer of a mere'(*WD* 62-63).

Both productive and ornamental, the landscape of the novel has all the hallmarks of the East Cheshire Plain on which Knutsford is located. Both nineteenth-century and

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Odyssey. J.V. Luce, *Celebrating Homer's Landscapes* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1998) 1; 9.
Throughout the chapter it will be argued that Gaskell was both realist and romantic, both topographically accurate and imaginatively creative in her landscapes and townscapes.

[13] Processes she had employed throughout her fiction.

[14] Moretti 70.

contemporary description of the area correspond closely to the image that Gaskell creates of this rural landscape in all her 'Knutsford based' writings. In his 1870 Guide, Murray writes that

> the plain [...] contains all the pleasant and sunny features of the English pastoral life while nowhere is the view so circumscribed as not to be relieved by distant hills [...] Cheshire was always noted, as it is now, for the number of its aristocracy and wealthy proprietors.[15]

One hundred and fifty years later Crosby echoes the image by describing a little changed Cheshire Plain as 'undulating pastoral acres, a smiling land dotted with woods and meres [...] with a rich legacy of landscaped parks and grounds.'[16]

The landscape in which Gaskell lived had evolved from the manorial system, which Sylvester argues was 'the territorial cornerstone of feudalism' and was to be of extraordinary importance in the rural landscape because it resulted in an vast acreage of emparked land,[17] greater than in any other county in England. By the time *Wives and Daughters, My Lady Ludlow* and the other short stories were set, that is, at the beginning of, and beyond, the second quarter of the nineteenth century, the process of parliamentary enclosure of open fields had long been complete and much of the common and waste land had been taken into production. In Cheshire furthermore, the process of 'enclosure of the commons, compacting and successful purchase' by influential families 'had combined to make possible the enlargement of parks in the era when landscaping reached its peak' in the eighteenth century.'[18]

As a result, the area around Knutsford became dominated by a range of country estates of varying size and importance owned by pre and post-Conquest families. Such estates are Tatton, Tabley, Capesthorne, Toft, Peover, and Alderley Park, many of which Sylvester observes had been 'altered, added to or in some cases rebuilt' by

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15 John Murray *Handbook for Travellers in Shropshire, Cheshire and Lancashire.* (London: John Murray, 1870) xi; lvi-vii.

16 Alan Crosby *A History of Cheshire* (Chichester: Phillimore, 1996) 14.

17 Dorothy Sylvester, 'The Manor and the Cheshire Landscape', *Transactions. of the Lancs. and Ches. Antiquarian Society* 70 (1960-1): 1. Sylvester discusses the effects of 'emparkment' on the Cheshire landscape in detail.

18 Dorothy Sylvester, *A History of Cheshire* 2nd ed. (Chichester: Phillimore, 1980) 72.

the early nineteenth century.[19] Gaskell's familiarity with several of these country houses and the families who inhabited them enabled her to amalgamate her knowledge and experience to create hybrids of the originals for her fictional purposes in Cumnor Towers, Hamley Hall and Hanbury Court.

However, there are two other distinctive and unmistakable topographical features which endorse the suggestion that these provincial novels and stories take their inspiration from the Cheshire countryside. 'Meres' and 'mosses' are local names for the same topographical feature, namely the depressions in the superficial deposits of boulder clay which coat the underlying geology. If the depression is deep enough it may be filled by water forming a shallow lake known locally as a 'mere'. It should be noted that 'meres' may also be man-made lakes found on country estates as an integral part of the landscaped parkland, such as the 'mere or large pond' (*WD* 72) at Hamley Hall. If the depression is partly infilled it becomes poorly drained land characterised by peat-bog. Such wetland sites provide a habitat suitable for a diversity of water tolerant plants of which *Drosera rotundifolia* is a classic example. This flowering plant, its wetland habitat, and the 'meres' themselves play a dramatic role in *Wives and Daughters* and will be discussed at a later stage to demonstrate the way in which biogeography and ecology (sciences which were known as 'natural history' at the beginning of the nineteenth century) are interwoven into the fabric of the novel.[20] Assemblage of this evidence provides a very good case for identifying the fictional landscape of her provincial novels with the Cheshire countryside around Knutsford, especially in *Wives and Daughters.* Those readers as familiar as the author with the

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[19] Sylvester, *A History of Cheshire* 72.

[20] K.J. Dormer and J.H. Tallis, 'Vegetation and Flora' *Manchester and its Region.* Published for the British Association. (Manchester: Manchester UP) 79-81. An indicator species of such wetland sites is *Drosera rotundifolia,* the common sundew. It is adapted to nutrient deficient conditions and according to Henry Green, it is also found on Knutsford Heath, therefore it is a plant with which Gaskell would have been familiar. Green described Knutsford Heath as a place 'where there is balmy pure refreshing air, and where in their season, can be found the dwarf yellow gorse, or the sundew or the golden potentilla or the tiny purple bells of heather'. Henry Green, *Knutsford, Its Traditions and History* (Knutsford, 1859) 7. However, as Easson points out, Gaskell left a gap in her manuscript for the name of the plant. Presumably she had to check its exact Latin name to add authenticity. Easson, notes, *Wives and Daughters* 690.

locality would have been convinced by her evocation of Cheshire, just as Gaskell's familiarity with Eliot's Warwickshire enabled her to identify the landscape of *Adam Bede* (*Letters* 533), and Emily Winkworth's intimate knowledge of Greenheys Fields, enabled her to recognise Manchester's rural periphery at the beginning of *Mary Barton* and consequently identify the anonymous author.[21]

The Midland Shires.

The reader is given little idea of the location of Hollingford on a map of England until a third of the way into the story, although there are some tiny clues in the first five instalments that might have been spotted by a discerning reader. For instance, on the opening page, Betty, the maid uses the word 'scomfished' which according to the notes which accompany twentieth-century editions of the novel, has broad northern geographical distribution.[22] Later Lady Harriet when asking Molly about her name, uses a north country manner of speaking: 'What is your name? or what do they call you?-as North-country people would express it?' (*WD*165).

When Mr Gibson meets Mrs Kirkpatrick for the first time after many years he was struck by her well modulated soft tone of voice in contrast to 'the broad country accent he was perpetually hearing.'(*WD* 107). These references might be taken as an indication that Hollingford is a north country town, but they fail to give a more precise geographical location.[23] Certainly, it was her intention to emphasise the country and provincial nature of the environment, but in *Wives and Daughters* , and in the other 'Knutsford-based' works, there is very little local dialect and it signifies social class rather than spatial differences. The diction of men like Silas, the gamekeeper, Mr Wilkins' servant, Dixon, and Harry Gregson reflect their working

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21 *Memorials of Two Sisters, Catherine and Susanna Winkworth* ed. Margaret Shaen (London: Longmans, 1908) 31.

22 Lerner, 711; Easson, notes, *Wives and Daughters* 689; Pam Morris, notes, *Wives and Daughters* by Elizabeth Gaskell (London: Penguin, 1996) 653. They concur in its regional usage and meaning which is 'spoiled or damaged.'

23 In other 'rural' works, like *Cousin Phillis* Gaskell is equally vague merely making reference to the fact that Paul had been working in the 'north' although his home was in Birmingham (*CP* 329). As in *Wives and Daughters,* there are references to 'strong northern dialects' but no direct evidence of them (*CP* 287).

class origins whereas local Hollingford residents like Mrs Goodenough and Mrs Dawes may speak in the broadest terms but their use of north country colloquialisms does not extend much beyond the lengthening of the vowel 'e' in words such as tell and heard to 'teel' and 'heerd'. This very limited use of local dialect, especially in the early part of *Wives and Daughters,* is not convincing evidence for the precise location of Hollingford. It merely gives some small but rather vague indication to the reader that the town is perhaps located 'somewhere in the north.'

However, by Chapter XV of *Wives and Daughters,* which was the sixth instalment in the Cornhill, Gaskell begins to include clues in the form of local dialect, real place names, and a regional context for the town, just as she had in *My Lady Ludlow.* The use of the local dialect word 'unked' reinforced by the reference to 'Warwickshire people' provided what appeared to be the first piece of security in the topographical jigsaw of the location of Hollingford:

> On Tuesday afternoon Molly returned home to the home which was already strange, and what Warwickshire people would call 'unked', to her. New paint new paper, new colours; grim servants dressed in their best and objecting to every change. (*WD* 177)

Alternatively, at this point in the narrative, any reader familiar with Gaskell's life might simply assume that Gaskell had picked up the word during her schooldays in and near Stratford upon Avon. However, at later point in the narrative, Gaskell leaves the reader in no doubt that Hollingford lies in the Midlands, so it may be assumed that the use of the word 'unked' here would have been intended to convey an initial sense of the location of Hollingford. As if to confirm the topographical security of Hollingford, Gaskell uses Osborne to make two references to the location of Hamley Hall. He comments that the name of Hamley is 'well and widely known' in the 'Midland shires' (*WD* 319) and that his French wife Aimée had not 'had the [...] incomparable blessing of being born of English parents, in the very heart of England-Warwickshire for instance'(*WD* 271). As the eldest son, Osborne was expected to marry within his social class and inherit the entailed estate. Instead, he married a governess-and a 'Frenchwoman and a Roman Catholic'(*WD* 270)- whose origins lay

outside the social and spatial heart of England. To the Squire, with his innate conservatism and belief in the traditional values associated with generations of his family, the marriage was anathema. Therefore, the location of Hamley is dramatically significant and entirely appropriate to Gaskell's artistic intentions. It is topographically secure in the Midlands county of Warwickshire-the spatial heart of England-which Gaskell intended should represent the values and traditions which are central to the social structure of her story.

However, these references to the Midlands may well give the reader a sense that there is a locational paradox at the heart of the novel for he/she may retain the impression that Gaskell modelled Hollingford on Knutsford and consequently the intended location of the novel is Cheshire. However, patience with Gaskell's method of the gradual build-up of locational detail may be rewarded in Chapter XIV, three quarters of the way through the novel. At this point she provides apparently indisputable evidence for Hollingford's location because real place names are reinforced by real topographical detail. Having borrowed a dog-cart, Mr Gibson chances to collect Molly (Cynthia was out and could not join them) to accompany him part of the way to visit a distant patient. At the foot of a hill, two miles from Hollingford, 'on the Barford Road' (*WD* 482), he suggests that Molly should jump down to walk home. His daughter pleads that she should be allowed to see the view:

> 'Oh, just let me go up to the top! I know we can see the blue range of the Malverns from it and Dorrimer Hall among the woods; the horse will want a minute's rest, and then I will get down without a word.'
> So she went to the top of the hill; and there they sate still a minute or two, enjoying the view, without much speaking. The woods were golden, the old house of purple-red brick, with its twisted chimneys, rose up from among them facing on to green lawns, and a placid lake; beyond again were the Malvern Hills! (*WD* 482)

As the narrative carries the reader up the hill to share the view with the protagonists in the drama, the novel seems topographically secure, for the view of the Malverns endorses 'a Midlands locale'[24] for Hollingford although it should be noted that the

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[24] Easson, notes, *Wives and Daughters* 721.

Malverns are situated on the Worcestershire-Herefordshire borders and Osborne's birthplace was 'Warwickshire-'the heart of England'.

It would seem from the reference to 'the Barford Road' that Gaskell had the area surrounding Stratford-upon-Avon in mind when she wrote this passage. Between 1824 and 1827, she was at school at Barford House, three miles from Stratford, so she would have become familiar with the area, its topography and views. According to Chitham, 'two years would have been long enough for someone as sensitive to place as Gaskell, to imbibe the local atmosphere'; therefore it might be supposed that she had seen and enjoyed the sort of view Molly sees from the top of the hill during her own teenage years.[25] Although Gaskell states that she never went out to tea when at Barford, her first published piece of writing was inspired by a visit she made to Clopton at the invitation of Mr and Mrs Wyatt, the parents of a school fellow. The essay was published as part of a chapter entitled 'A visit to Stratford-on-Avon' in William Howitt's *Visits to Remarkable Places* (1840), which was her first published piece of writing. In this essay, As a preface to Gaskell's story of Charlotte Clopton, Howitt describes the precise location of Clopton Hall.:

> The stately old mansion where this family resided for more than five hundred years, stands advantageously on a fine upland about a mile above the town of Stratford, and commands all the fair vale in which Stratford stands. It looks full upon the woody spot to the right of the town in which Shottry lies nestled, and has for the boundary of its view, at the distance of some eight or ten miles, the long line of the Ilmington and Meon hills. [26]

From the similarities between this description of Howitt's and that of Gaskell's in *Wives and Daughters*, it may be true to say that her fiction was inspired by her experience of views from Clopton. However, the Malvern Hills are twenty-two miles from this 'fine upland' above Stratford. Even from the viewpoint which is 300 feet above sea level it is debatable whether the ridge of the Malverns would have been

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[25] Edward Chitham, 'Elizabeth Gaskell's Schooldays,' *Gaskell Society Journal* 5 (1991): 2. Chitham records the state of knowledge of Gaskell's early schooldays collating evidence from all the available sources in the first part of his paper.

[26] William Howitt, *Visits to Remarkable Places* 2nd ed. (London,1840) 134.

visible at this distance.[27] If the view from Clopton was Gaskell's inspiration it would seem that she substituted the Malverns for the northern scarp of the Cotswolds which is represented by Howitt's 'Ilmington and Meon hills' despite the topographical impossibility of the substitution. It is perhaps far more likely that Gaskell was remembering the scene but named the Malverns rather than the Ilmington or Meon hills, perhaps because she thought they would have been more familiar to her readers. However, there is a third explanation which fits Gaskell's artistic technique as well as the topography. She may have amalgamated two or even three remembered, familiar views. Views of the Pennine foothills would have filled the Cheshire landscapes of her childhood; she knew the view from Clopton Hall in Warwickshire and the view of the Malvern Hills may have been generated by her visits to Boughton House in Worcestershire, the home of her married cousin Louisa Holland. Louisa had married J. Whitmore Isaac, who had Boughton House built for him. The house stands on a spur of land between the River Teme and its tributary, the Laughtern Brook to the SW of Worcester, at a height of 40 feet above the level of the flood plain. From the house there would have been, and still are, magnificent views of the Malvern Hills which dominate the horizon because they rise abruptly from the sandstone plain to form a marked ridge of hills founded on ancient, resistant Pre-Cambrian, Cambrian and Silurian rocks eight miles to the south-west.[28] Gaskell, who often stayed at Boughton House, would have been familiar with the view.[29] Whether the possible

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[27] Phyllis Hicks confirms that 'the Malvern Hills are visible from a point just outside the little town' (of Stratford). Phyllis D. Hicks, *A Quest of Ladies: A History of a Warwickshire School* (Birmingham, 1949) 81. On the other hand, staff at the Warwickshire Record Office confirm that it is not possible to see the Malverns from Clopton. A visit on a clear day would seem to endorse the view that the Malverns are not visible from viewpoints above Stratford. (October 27 1999). However, the line of the Meon and Ilmington Hills are easily visible and appear 'blue and distant' in autumn sunshine. Therefore it seems that Gaskell combined real topographies to create her own landscape unique to her final novel.

[28] 'Letter on Boughton Park,' *Gaskell Society Newsletter* 3 Spring (1987): 14.

[29] She visited and wrote enthusiastically from Boughton in 1850 and visited again 1856. *Letters* 137; 398. The air was beneficial to her health, she writes in 1850 that: 'I am a different creature to what I am in Manchester' *Letters* 139.

amalgamation was deliberate or inadvertent, the effect is the same: the technique secures Hollingford topographically in the Midlands.

In addition to parallels in the physical landscape, there is another similarity between her description of the view in *Wives and Daughters* and that of Clopton Hall in *Visits to Remarkable Places.* The fictitious 'Dorrimer hall' is an 'old house of purple-red brick'. Gaskell describes Clopton as a 'large heavy compact square brick building of that deep dead red almost approaching purple'. The similarity is too close and obvious to ignore. Nestling as it does at the foot of the slope amongst trees, the parallels seem to suggest that Gaskell's memory was of this spot in the heart of England. The old manor house has 'twisted chimneys'. Chimneys are a favourite architectural motif of Gaskell's. Careful study of old photographs and prints of Clopton House reveal that its Tudor chimneys were decorative but not twisted which would have been indisputable endorsement of the inspiration for this view.[30] 'Queer-like stone chimneys' signpost Hope Farm, and twisted chimneys are found atop Dorrimer Hall. However, as these chimneys characterised so many manor houses and homes of the Tudor period and were associated with the brick and black-and-white timbered architecture of so much of the Cheshire and Midlands Plains, they would have been very familiar to Gaskell.[31] Clearly the repeated mention of them suggests that they were viewed with affection, and therefore Gaskell had a tendency to incorporate them into the architecture of her fiction. Therefore, it seems that she selected, manipulated and deliberately amalgamated her experience of both Cheshire and the Midlands to create an imaginary, but, topographically secure geography. By the use of a real range of hills-

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[30] Geoffrey Tyack, *Warwickshire Country Houses* (Chichester: Phillimore, 1994) 50. Twisted chimneys are a distinctive feature of Tudor architecture and although the writer has not been able to establish the exact location of Gaskell's inspiration for this often used architectural feature, it is clear that they intrigued her. The 'Hope Farm chimneys are a 'stack of queer-like stone chimneys.' (*CP* 264). There were many varieties of such chimneys and illustrations can be found in the major works on the architecture of the period. e.g. J.A. Gotch, *The Growth of the English House* (London: Batsford, 1909) 162; *Early Renaissance Architecture in England* (London: Batsford, 1901) 126.

[31] P.H.Ditchfield *The Manor Houses of England* (London: Batsford 1910) 119.
F.R. Smith *The Historical Architecture of Britain* (London: Pitman, 1951) 105-7. These manor houses are well documented and such details appear in major works on the houses of the respective counties.

the Malverns- she authenticated the location of 'Knutsford-based' Hollingford in the Midlands, even if the view of these hills is in itself an amalgam of Warwickshire and Worcestershire and even Cheshire. This theory seems consistent with the method of using observation, amalgamation and manipulation to create an 'invention' that is her own inimitable topography which may or may not be spatially accurate. Morris, on the other hand, implies that the inspiration for the fact that Gaskell set *Wives and Daughters* in the 'Silurian locality' of the Malverns is derived from Murchison, the geologist. In her assemblage of evidence, Morris acknowledges his renowned studies of the local rocks, his presidency of the Royal Geographical Society, and sets this evidence alongside textual material in order to substantiate her suggestion.[32] It has some basis in autobiographical fact as Gaskell was interested in science, knew several scientists personally, and used real scientists in her novel because it is set within the context of developments in scientific thought.[33] Although an intriguing theory, it makes a convenient intellectual argument but is perhaps is less likely than her usual method of selecting familiar places for inspiration.

There is further evidence from the text which can be used to support the view that Hollingford was located in the 'midland shires' as Gaskell intersperses real names alongside fictitious ones. There is an occasion of considerable dramatic significance in the novel when Cynthia explains to Molly the history and nature of her entanglement with Preston. An invitation by friends to the Worcester festival resulted in Preston's financial support for the trip. Molly's entrapment in Cynthia's web of deceit, and her efforts to assist Cynthia to extricate herself from the commitment she had made to Preston, had repercussions in terms of Molly's reputation in Hollingford society. At the time of the invitation Cynthia was living in Ashcombe, 'a journey

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[32] A full exposition can be referred to on pages xxiii and xxiv in her introduction to the novel. Elizabeth Gaskell *Wives and Daughters* ed. by Pam Morris (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996) xxiv.

[33] Uglow writes that 'Elizabeth had known many scientists from the aristocratic Lord Francis Egerton to her close friend Benjamin Brodie'. Uglow, 560. The French zoologist, Etienne Geoffroi Saint-Hilaire in *Wives and Daughters.* He visited Cumnor Towers interested to meet Roger who had published a paper that had taken the scientific world by storm. *WD* 315.

from Worcester' (*WD* 492), but Gaskell gives no precise detail about their relative geographical locations, although it might be assumed that she intended that both places were in the Midlands. Ashcombe is seventeen or eighteen miles from Hollingford and Coreham. These three equidistant fictitious towns stage a Charity Ball triennially. Easson considers that the three towns and the reference to Worcester is based on 'The Three Choirs festival held annually in Worcester, Gloucester or Hereford' and asserts that the reference to Worcester stresses the 'Midlands locale'.[34] However, there is no evidence that Ashcombe and Coreham were modelled on these real towns, indeed there is very little reference to them as physical entities at all. It would seem that Gaskell was using reality as the basis for a fictional topography, the precise details of which are rather vague. However, she achieved a measure of topographical security and authenticity by the specific reference to Worcester, not only for Cynthia's story but also for the location of Hollingford in the Midlands.

The Topographical Jigsaw-complete.

However, on the basis of this reading of Gaskell's topography it is difficult to include a map. If Cheshire was used as the basis and Hollingford located on the site of Knutsford, the Malvern Hills would be nowhere in sight. It is possible that Macclesfield and Congleton-towns which are roughly equidistant from Knutsford-could stand for Coreham and Ashcombe but they did not have a triennial music festival. Also imprecise spatial relationships within Hollingford make the town impossible to map. Jennifer Gribble's inclusion of a map at the beginning of the new edition of *Scenes of Clerical Life* may serve to illustrate the topography of Warwickshire applicable to Eliot's novel but such a map is not possible for *Wives and Daughters.*[35] Neither does there appear to be sufficient detail to attempt a map

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[34] Easson, notes, *Wives and Daughters* 721.

[35] George Eliot, *Scenes of Clerical Life* ed. Jennifer Gribble (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1998), frontispiece map. Ironically on the opening page of her novel, Eliot expresses the view that she feels that much is lost when 'new varnished efficiency' reduces 'picturesque inefficiency' to 'diagrams, plans elevations and sections' Eliot 7. I am grateful to Alan Shelston for drawing my attention to Eliot's point of view. Although Gaskell is fond of floor plans of houses, her landscape descriptions are always multi-dimensional, as will be discussed.

equivalent to either Trollope's own map nor Knox's reconstruction of Barsetshire, just as Chapman insisted that there was insufficient topographical detail in *Emma* to produce a map.[36] Of course, the lack of such a map does not negate the emphasis Gaskell laid upon topography and place in her work, it merely endorses the argument that her landscapes were a product of 'creative recollection'.

Apparent endorsement for this thesis that the topography of *Wives and Daughters* is an amalgam of Cheshire and the midlands counties can be found in Angus Easson's 1979 definitive critical study of Gaskell's works. He states 'that Hollingford is as much of Warwickshire as Knutsford.'[37] Also, supporting evidence can be found in Phyllis Hicks' history of the school which Elizabeth Stevenson attended near Stratford. She writes:

> A study of her works leads one to wonder whether Knutsford has not been regarded too exclusively as her model, and whether Stratford may not claim an important part in her inspiration. The Hollingford of *Wives and Daughters* has as many Warwickshire as Cheshire characteristics; its church, like Stratford's has a spire, whereas Knutsford's has a tower; the Malvern Hills are visible from a point just outside the little town; and there is an expedition to the Worcester Festival. These are small points, it is true, but they are not without significance.[38]

Both writers, however, justify their quest for the inspiration for the landscape of *Wives and Daughters,* Easson by agreeing that 'Gaskell is not evoking a single place she knows but is creating time and place, even if at the back of it are experience and reminiscences of her own.' However, in his footnotes to his 1987 edition of the novel, Easson implies that rather than a process of amalgamation, Gaskell shifted the topography during the course of the novel. He writes:

> The town is initially based on Knutsford, with Cumnor Towers corresponding to Tatton Hall. The novel's topography *shifts (*my italics*)* later

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36 Michael Sadleir, *Trollope: A Commentary* (London: Constable, 1928) 154-5. Jane Austen *Emma* ed. R.W. Chapman (Oxford: Clarendon, 1924) 521.

37 Angus Easson, *Elizabeth Gaskell* (London: Routledge, 1979) 3; 187.

38 Hicks, 80-81.

> to the Midlands, probably prompted by Gaskell's memories of schooldays in Warwickshire.'[39]

and follows these observations with another footnote about Gaskell's reference to the 'range of the Malverns' which he considers, 'establishes clearly that the setting of the story, at least in this latter part, is in the south-west Midlands.'[40] The implication of this observation is that Gaskell started the novel with Hollingford based in the Cheshire landscape and then moved the town to the Midlands later as suited her artistic purposes. This is not necessarily the case. As has been pointed out there are no direct references to the regional location of Hollingford early in the novel, and when the references appear, there is no reason to think that she had made an imaginative shift of locality. It seems perfectly possible that it was Gaskell's intention from the beginning to locate Hollingford and its surroundings in the Midlands. In this way the landscape was topographically secure on two levels. It was situated deep within the 'enclosed intimacy' of undulating, well wooded, farms and ornamental parks typical of the Cheshire countryside which were located regionally in the Midlands and probably, in Gaskell's mind, in Warwickshire.[41] As has been discussed both here and in previous chapters, Gaskell's spatial awareness did not always extend to mappable topographies. Her concerns were less about creating a recognisable mappable topography and more about creating a picture of 'country town life' so she did not wish to be constrained by the realities of one particular locality. Instead she amalgamated and manipulated rather than shifted the topography. The process of topographical manipulation was appropriate and deliberate, for it did not dislocate Hollingford but enabled Gaskell to place her fictional provincial town in the 'heart of England' which was the spatial and social environment she required for her story about wives and daughters.

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39 Easson, notes, *Wives and Daughters* 689.

40 Easson, notes, 721.

41 The similarity of the landscape of the Midlands and Cheshire Plains is determined by the similar underlying geology of red sandstone and some glacial clays. A.E.Trueman, *Geology and Scenery of England and Wales* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971) 154.

If the argument advanced still remains unconvincing, there is another plank which can added which should succeed in persuading even the most sceptical of readers that it has veracity. There is a precedent for the argument of topographical amalgamation and manipulation in preference to topographical shift. Gaskell used the same technique in an earlier work, a point which has not been highlighted to date. Hanbury Court, the country estate at the heart of *My Lady Ludlow,* appears to be embedded in a rural landscape highly reminiscent of both Cheshire and the Midlands counties of Worcestershire and Warwickshire. Side by side, with Margaret Dawson the narrator of this tale, the reader travels 'through the most pastoral country she had ever seen' to Hanbury Court. 'By-and-by we ascended a long hill [...]. We were at last at the top,–on a long, breezy, sweeping, unenclosed piece of ground called, as I afterwards learnt, a Chase' (*MLL* 5). From there over unpaved muddy lanes, the route took them on to lower land shut in on either side by rows of high elms from which they look down on 'stacks of twisted chimneys rising out of a group of trees, beyond which lay a great square lawn'(*MLL* 6). Readers of *Ruth, Cousin Phillis* and *Wives and Daughters* might recognise the repeated and contrasting landscape motifs of high, unenclosed common land, quiet pastoral, wooded country, landscaped parkland and distinctive architecture. The unenclosed viewpoint is highly reminiscent of the place where Ruth and Bellingham watch the sunset. The inspiration for this landscape has been revealed as Alderley Edge, the sandstone escarpment only six miles from Knutsford. Equally *My Lady Ludlow* could be inspired by Malvern Chase, an area which was royal forest where hunting rights were preserved. Its unenclosed nature is the result of these 'strict hunting laws.'[42]

As is the case with Hollingford, the regional location of Hanbury Court is not revealed in the initial chapter of the story. However, a little way into Chapter 2 Gaskell reveals that she imagines Hanbury Court to be in Warwickshire.

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[42] For a full discussion of Alderley Edge see the chapter on *Ruth.* David Lloyd, *History of Worcestershire* (Chichester: Phillimore, 1993) has an excellent photograph of Malvern Chase 43. Gaskell might have been familiar with this stretch of land from her visits to Boughton.

Now and then we rode out with her in her coach-and-four. She did not like to go out with a pair of horses, considering this rather beneath her rank; and indeed, four horses were very often needed to pull her heavy coach through the stiff mud. But it was rather a cumbersome equipage through the narrow Warwickshire lanes.(*MLL* 20).

Therefore the reader and critic can return to the first chapter to piece together its inspirational source. In his attempt to see how far the setting of *My Lady Ludlow,* reflects the 'Warwickshire milieu,' Chitham drew the conclusion that the topography at the beginning of the story 'subsequently identified with Warwickshire does not correspond with Barford or Stratford.' This is correct. As has been suggested all the quintessential elements of both the Cheshire and Midlands landscapes are present in the descriptions of the environs of Hanbury Court. However, having failed to solve the jigsaw, Chitham prefaced his concluding remarks with: 'it might be best to say', and then continues: 'that in writing *My Lady Ludlow*, Mrs Gaskell was reminiscing over her schooldays. But there is certainly no attempt to represent any particular village or precise identifications as with Whitby in *Sylvia's Lovers'*.[43] That is true: Gaskell does not replicate a settlement, but further research might have led to the discovery that she had a local house in mind when she located and described Lady Ludlow's home. The distant view of Hanbury Court is reminiscent of both the fictitious Dorrimer Hall in *Wives and Daughters* and the real Clopton House. Built of red-brick, it possesses a gate-house, both of which are features of Clopton, and with its twisted chimneys, great square lawn and tree-surround it resembles the situation of Dorrimer Hall. However, as will be discussed subsequently, Gaskell's houses are usually hybrids so Chitham was right to hedge his bets and conclude, 'it might be best to say'. Hicks also missed the point about Gaskell's technique of amalgamation in relation to Hanbury Court for whilst she recognised the 'peculiar' interior floor plan

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[43] Chitham 13-14. However, Chitham recognises real place names within the region like Henley, Hanbury, Barford, Hathaway and Birmingham. These places ensure make Hanbury Court's topographical security in the Midlands.

to be reminiscent of Avonbank as 'one room opened out of another' and the 'vivid picture of Elizabeth Stevenson's room at Avonbank', she also failed to correlate Hanbury Court with Clopton House.[44]

Therefore there seems to be sufficient evidence to reach the conclusion that Gaskell was inspired to amalgamate and manipulate the familiar territory of her Warwickshire schooldays and Cheshire childhood as she did in her final novel, in order to create unique fictional landscapes.

The reader is presented with another topographical jigsaw to complete in *Cousin Phillis.* At least it is regionally secure in that the author makes it clear that Paul is working in a 'northern' landscape to build the railway branch line from Eltham to Hornby (*CP* 329). Hope Farm appears to be inspired by Sandlebridge, so closely matched are the rural landscape and domestic interior to that corner of the Cheshire landscape, two and half miles from Knutsford.[45] However, little research has appeared in the literature about the inspiration for the building of the railway in this novel apart from the obvious link to the coming of the railway to Knutsford in 1862. The extension of the line from Altrincham to Northwich was a relatively late development, one which was not warmly welcomed by the inhabitants of the town.[46] Contemporary events almost certainly provided Gaskell with the idea for the story of a young girl living in an enclosed pastoral world far removed from the realities of technological innovation, but it seems that the inspiration for places and landscapes may have been derived from a far wider area than this corner of Cheshire.

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[44] Hicks 81.

[45] Uglow lists the chief similarities of 'pillars with large stone balls, grassy path and oak shovel board'. Uglow 41. The source of Uglow's information comes from a preface to *Cranford* that contains a detailed description of Sandlebridge. Anne Thackeray Ritchie, preface, *Cranford* by Elizabeth Gaskell (London,1895) xiii.

[46]Joan Leach, letter to the author, 25 Sept. 1998. She provides some information from a local newspaper in 1865 which both poetically and in prose implies reservations about the innovation. 'The railway was opened in Knutsford on 12 May 1862 with no ostentation and very little ceremony'. *Macclesfield Courier* 1 Apr. 1865. This was followed by another piece on 15 April that said: 'Like a sleeping beauty lovely Knutsford long remained at rest. Other towns strove, prayed and paid for railways. Knutsford would not touch the unclean thing'.

Throughout the novel the place names in the novel are both real and fictitious. Birmingham, in the West Midlands, is Paul's home and the hub of industrial and technological innovation. Hornby, the small market town at the end of the newly constructed railway line in the novel, is, in reality, located in the Lune Valley near Lancaster in North Lancashire. It had a railway line by 1850. Murray says of Hornby, 'few villages are situated more prettily'.[47] Although the fictional railway in the novel has to traverse a 'shaking moss' so typical of the Cheshire landscape and reminiscent of the construction of the Liverpool-Manchester railway across Chat Moss,[48] Gaskell describes the countryside through which the railway passes as 'wild and pretty.' Whilst the Cheshire landscape is pretty, it can hardly qualify as 'wild'. However, the branch line which links Lancaster to Clapham, a small village nestling under the steep high slopes of Ingleborough, passes through Hornby. Certainly the landscape at the eastern end of this line can be accurately described as 'wild', a word Gaskell always used of landscapes with which she was unfamiliar. Records 'in the Lancaster press were enthusiastic' about the landscape of Lancaster-Hornby section of the line it described:

> crags and woods of the Lune Valley, with Ingleborough towering beyond;[...] the Lune full to the brink, the autumn tinted woods, 'gently curved' hills in the foreground and 'larger masses in the blue distance.[49]

Their description appears to encapsulate the landscape that Gaskell summarised in the two adjectives, 'pretty' and 'wild' in a way which is not true of Cheshire.

During the course of construction of the fictitious branch line, Holdsworth was sent to manage another undertaking in the 'dark, overshadowed' valley of Hensleydale.

Whilst the name is reminiscent of Wensleydale, a valley not far from the Lancashire-Yorkshire border, in the same locality as the railway line, its topography suggests

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[47] Murray, 293.

[48] 'Chat Moss is a huge bog-a dreary barren waste of a texture of soft, semi-fluid and spongy. In 1826 draining began and on the first day of 1830 the Rocket locomotive passed over with a carriage and company'. I. Shaw, *Views of the Most Interesting Scenery on the Line of the Liverpool and ManchesterRrailway.* Facsimile of the 1831 edition (Oldham: Hugh Broadbent ,1980) 13-14.

[49] G.O. Holt, *Regional History of the Railways of Great Britain.* vol. 10 (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1978) 232. The first section of the branch line from Lancaster to Clapham which links to the main line from Ingleton to Skipton was opened in 1849 so it was newly operational when Gaskell and her party of friends went from Silverdale across to Yorkshire in 1852.

Cowan Bridge. Located in the valley of Leck Beck, (a tributary of the Lune) it is the village in which Charlotte Brontë went to school. The school and its location inspired the Lowood School of *Jane Eyre* in which it is described as: 'that forest-dell where Lowood lay, was the cradle of fog and fog-bred pestilence, which, quickening with the quickening spring, breathed typhus through its crowded school room [...].' [50] Both the fictitious and real places were characterised by high incidence of typhus fever, the disease contracted by Holdsworth whilst working in 'Hensleydale' which necessitated his recuperation at Hope Farm. Gaskell's fiction at this point in *Cousin Phillis* demonstrates indisputably that she believed in environmental determinism[51] and the correlation of places in North Lancashire seems convincing. However, if the evidence for the theory that Gaskell partly used the North Lancashire-Cheshire borders for her inspiration appears flimsy, consideration of corroborating autobiographical evidence will reinforce the argument. Whilst Gaskell was very familiar with North Lancashire, she had visited the western area of Yorkshire for the first time in 1852. When the family were on holiday in Silverdale during that summer, William hired a carriage to take an expedition of family and friends to the Wharfe valley and Malham-Gordale area.[52] Accessibility from Silverdale was via the Lune Valley and then either by road or rail from Hornby. The whole group stopped on route at Borwick Hall to sketch and then travelled on to Hornby. From here Marianne and Catherine Winkworth caught the train as there was insufficient room in the carriage for everyone.[53] Further experience of Hornby came three years later whilst Gaskell she was researching *The Life.* She visited family friends, the Alcocks at Burrow Hall in August 1855, making elaborate plans by letter to fit in her programme with her hostess:

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50 Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* ed. Margaret Smith (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1975) 79.

51 This theme of the inextricable link between health and the environment permeates her first three novel and *The Life.*

52 See Chapters 3 and 4.

53 Susanna Winkworth, ed. *Letters and Memorials of Catherine Winkworth* vol. I (Clifton: E. Austin, 1883) 355-6.

> Will it suit you if I come to you on next Saturday by the train that arrives (*from Skipton*) at Hornby at 3.42?
> I should then hope to spend Sunday with you, & return to Silverdale on Monday next, by either Lancaster or Milnthorpe according to your convenience in sending me to either Hornby, or Milnthorpe (*Letters* 368).

Their home, Burrow Hall, is higher up the Lune Valley about 5 miles from Hornby. Gaskell describes its location as 'far removed from railways and post offices and all such new-fangled inventions where nothing more interesting than the adventures of the rooks in building their nests ever happens to disturb the deep serene.'[54]

Cowan Bridge is only about one mile along Leck Beck from Burrow Hall, so it conceivable that she visited the site of Charlotte's schooldays on that occasion. In fact it may have been the purpose of the visit, as by the beginning of September she reported to Ellen Nussey that she had been to Cowan Bridge (*Letters* 871). She visited Burrow Hall again for a longer stay in March 1856 when she must have become even more familiar with the locality.

Although the inspirational connections with Cheshire are strong and Hope Farm is deeply rooted in its countryside, all in all in *Cousin Phillis,* there appears to be an assemblage of convincing evidence to demonstrate that the topography of this novel, like that of *My Lady Ludlow* and *Wives and Daughters,* was the subject of topographical amalgamation and manipulation rather than shift in order to create a unique landscape. The 'wild' unfamiliar landscape of Yorkshire, the deep, dark valley of the River Leck, and the branch line from Lancaster to Clapham played their inspirational role in this novel. Once it is recognised that elements of the North Lancashire-Yorkshire borders must be incorporated into the Cheshire landscape, the topographical jigsaw of *Cousin Phillis* can be completed.

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54 J.A.V Chapple, 'Two Unpublished Gaskell Letters from Burrow Hall, Lancashire,' *Gaskell Society Journal* 6 (1992): 69.

Having pieced together the clues to complete the puzzle, the commentator is in the position to consider the literary significance of these topographies in Gaskell's provincial-rural fiction.

NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

Introduction

The narrative structure and drive of Gaskell's provincial novels is built upon the social geography of her fictional towns, which, although inspired by Knutsford and its rural environs, is tailored to the needs of each particular story. Even amongst this group of stories, her geographical spread and social range varies from the narrowly focused lens of *Cousin Phillis* and *My Lady Ludlow* in which farm and country estate provide the narrative structure and drive, through *Cranford* and *Mr Harrison's Confessions,* in which the town itself is the focus of attention, to the wider geographical scope of *Wives and Daughters,* which encompasses provincial town, country estate and a metropolitan and wider world beyond.

However, in her final novel Gaskell appears to follow Jane Austen's advice 'to work upon [...] three or four families in a country village'[55] by creating the town of Hollingford, which comprises four physically and socially distinct but overlapping and intimately linked spheres. They form the foundations of the narrative. Once again Moretti's model of narrative structure seems apt and highly applicable to this study of Gaskell's provincial novels especially in relation to *Wives and Daughters* and therefore it has been adapted and represented diagrammatically for use as the basis of discussion of Hollingford and its environs.[56]

However, these socio-spatial spheres also embody value systems which it is not really possible to represent diagrammatically but feature as part of the discussion.

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[55] *Jane Austen's letters to her sister Cassandra and others,* ed. R.W.Chapman vol. II 1811-1817 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1932) 401. Gaskell had read *Emma* for she mentions it in the *Cumberland Sheep-Shearers.* Elizabeth Gaskell, *A Dark Night's Work* ed. Suzanne Lewis (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992) 246.

[56] These narrative universes have both social connotation and spatial expression. Although Craik did not devise a diagrammatic scheme for these realms, she recognised that the structure of *Wives and Daughters* depended upon them and appropriately termed them, 'socio-topographical.' *Elizabeth Gaskell and the Provincial Novel* (London: Methuen, 1975) 244.

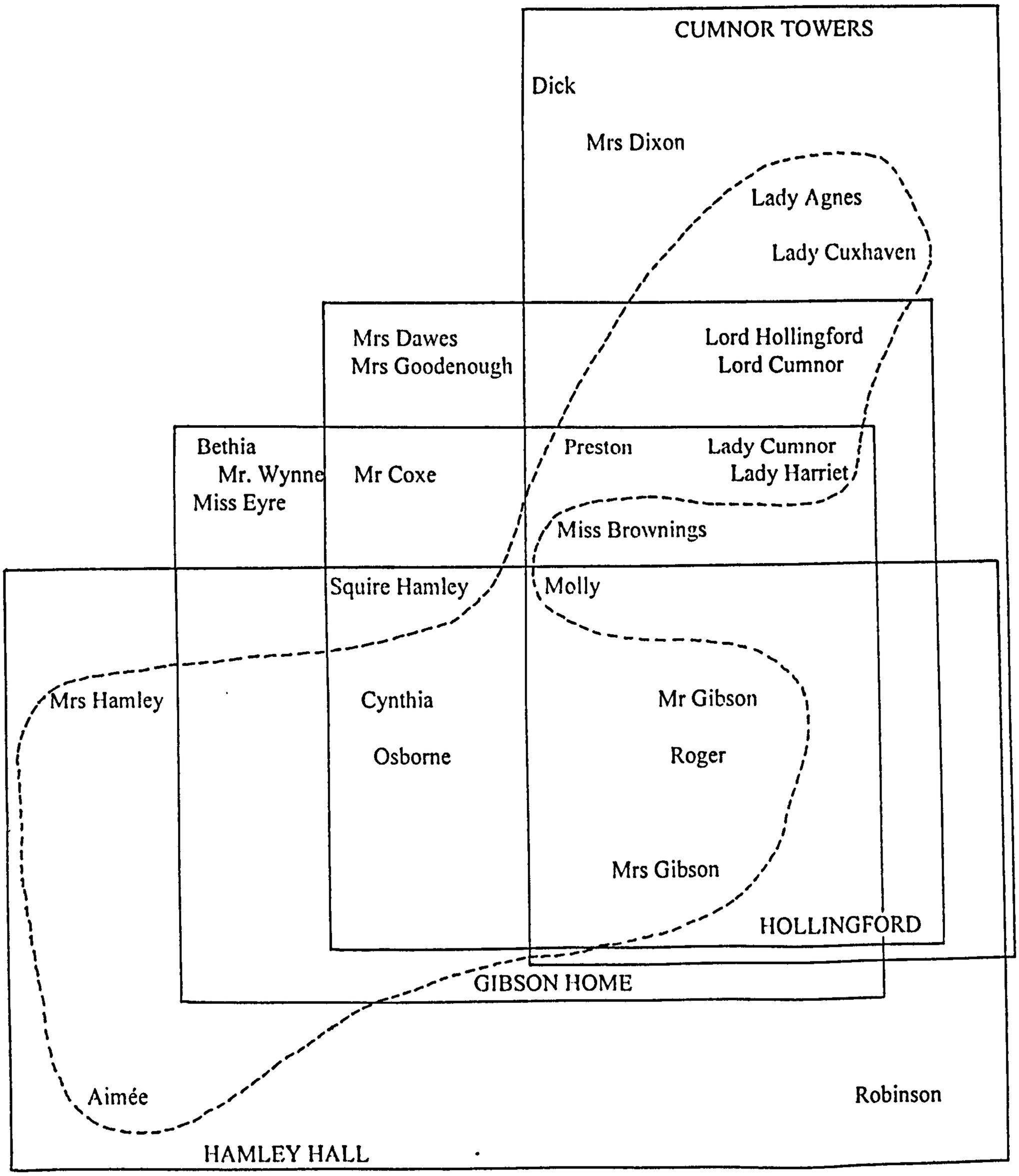

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Fig.6.1 The Narrative Structure of *Wives and Daughters*

The story focuses on three families, Mr Gibson, a middle class professional, and his daughter Molly, who live in Hollingford; Lord and Lady Cumnor, Whig aristocrats who live in 'the great house' located adjacent to the town; and Squire and Mrs Hamley and their two sons who are members of the Tory squirearchy.[57] Although their modest country estate, Hamley Hall, is located seven miles from Hollingford, they are part of the town's social network.

Although spatially and socially distinct, the 'realms' or 'spheres' created by Gaskell around the three families and town society are not autonomous. They are inextricably linked throughout the novel, and the links are made both horizontally, as the characters move between the places and relationships develop, and vertically, as Gaskell seeks to demonstrate the hierarchical nature of provincial society in Hollingford. There are some distinct similarities with her first novel in that the spatial spheres are homes within one place, although the vertical nature of the social hierarchy is more complex, and the narrative dynamic is controlled more by the author than character movement.

However, the question arises as to whether Gaskell, by using for inspiration this provincial and rural 'core-area' of Knutsford, created a 'small England' or even a small world.[58] The narrative does not move beyond the provincial and rural surroundings of Hollingford, Cranford or Duncombe but these towns have socio-economic links with larger towns and cities in England and beyond. Characters move in and out of her small, fictional towns, forging these links often with real metropolitan worlds like London (*WD* and *Mr H*), Birmingham (*CP*) and Rome (*ADNW*) and fictitious towns like Drumble (*C)* and East Chester (*ADNW*). Gaskell 'is aware that the society she describes is founded upon exploitation and Empire'[59] so

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[57] Hatano has recognised the epithets, 'Whig aristocracy' and 'Tory Squirearchy' to represent the values of these two families. The former is fundamentally progressive and the latter, conservative and traditional. Yoko Hatano, 'Fanny Price and Molly Gibson: Bearers of the country-house tradition', *Gaskell Society Journal* 10 (1996): 94.

[58] Moretti 14.

[59] Uglow 586.

the geographical spread of these works stretches, beyond the shores of England, through continental Europe to the far-flung corners of the Empire, southwards to Africa,(*WD*) eastwards to India and Ceylon (*C*) westwards to the 'New World'. (*CP*). Whilst the axes of movement may appear longer and more varied than those in *Mary Barton, Sylvia's Lovers* or *Cousin Phillis,* for the characters move beyond Gaskell's 'core-area,' the narratives do not (with the exception of *A Dark Night's Work*).

Therefore it can be argued that the novels are not structured 'axiologically' through Europe to distant continents but 'nodally' around a provincial town.[60] Gaskell's nodal narrative technique is largely determined by her familiarity with, and emotional attachment to, the provincial countryside. She wrote these stories spontaneously, that is, without engaging in research so it seems that her choice of locations beyond the 'core area' was guided arbitrarily, by familiarity, desire and expediency, hence the fact that Rome and Winchester appear in *A Dark Night's Work* (1863). She had visited and stayed in both places in the five to six years prior to the writing this story and their appearance in the story makes the structure of the tale more axiological than most of her other provincial writings.[61]

By analysing the social geography of the provincial towns, the nature of their rural environs and the links between them, it will be possible to demonstrate their role in determining narrative structure and drive and the extent to which they determine character and destiny.

GASKELL'S PROVINCIAL TOWNS

Introduction.

As has been mentioned, it is widely recognised that Gaskell 're-created' Knutsford arising from her belief in the inextricable link between place and character. 'What happens' in Cranford, Hollingford, Duncombe and Hamley is partly determined by the spatial, socio-economic and political framework of these small Regency and early

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[60] Moretti 20.

[61] Gaskell visited Rome in 1857 and Winchester in 1861. Winchester appears in Sylvia's Lovers because she was writing that novel during 1861.

Victorian towns[62] but it must also be noted that, however realistic the portrait appears, the reader is presented with a picture which arrives through either the double perceptual filter of both character and author or the single perceptual filter if Gaskell uses a first person narrator, e.g. in *Cousin Phillis*.[63] Interwoven into the perceived realism is symbolic representation, a technique which is a constant feature of her writing because it illustrates the underpinning philosophy of the inextricable link between humans and their environment. Superimposed upon this not entirely objective realistic picture, Gaskell lays a veneer of ironic humour, a style which characterises all her works but is particularly noticeable in her provincial fiction. Paradoxically, it enables her to maintain an emotional distance from the portrait whilst creating a vivid picture of the nuances of provincial life for the reader.

Place Names

The towns of Duncombe, Cranford, Eltham, Hamley and Hollingford have been recognised as fictional versions of Knutsford. However it is difficult to recognise a methodology in the choice of these names as it has been in her previous work. Hollingford began as 'Hollyford', later becoming 'Chesterford' in the manuscript of *Wives and Daughters*.[64] Hellingford, the assize town which features in *A Dark Night's Work* has that function in common with Knutsford, therefore may have been partly Knutsford-inspired, although spatially it seems to be located in the West country, for Ellinor catches the Great Western Railway from London to reach Hellingford.[65] Its name is so similar to the Hollingford of *Wives and Daughters*

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[62] Moretti 70. Moretti's thesis is a highly deterministic one. He states that 'space is not outside the narrative but an internal force that shapes it from within. *What* happens depends a lot on *where* it happens'.

[63] Peter Gould and Rodney White, *Mental Maps* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), 48. They suggest that 'our views of the world about people and places are formed from a highly filtered set of impressions and our images are strongly affected by the information we receive through our filters. That is why filter control is so crucial'. This idea of an image of a place and its diagrammatic representation in the form of a 'mental map' pervades the argument and is one which is incorporated into Moretti's thesis, Moretti 70. See Chapter 4 208.

[64] Easson, notes, *Wives and Daughters* 689.

[65] Despite research about the London railway stations it has been difficult to ascertain the details of the geography of this part of *A Dark Night's Work*. Either Gaskell deliberately obfuscates or there is more

demonstrates perhaps a slight lack of imagination and slight impatience with such details on the part of the author. Similarly, the name Hamley appears in both *Wives and Daughters* and *A Dark Night's Work.*

Hope Farm is located on the outskirts of the village of Heathbridge. Of all these names, the latter conveys the greatest sense of spatial inspiration for it appears to be an amalgamation of Sandlebridge, the name of her grandparents' farm and 'the heath' at Knutsford. Gaskell's childhood landscape was dominated by the heath, which filled the view from the front of Aunt Lumb's house, which itself was known as 'The Heath'.

Population size and structure

Gaskell's towns are described frequently as 'small'. Although not specified, the epithet could be a measure of physical population or social class size. Hamley is a settlement of 'about four thousand inhabitants' which is about the same number as Knutsford in 1831.[66] Geographers consider population size a rather arbitrary measure of settlement classification preferring to use functions for the purpose. However, one of the most highly acclaimed applied theoretical models of settlement patterns indicates that a county town can be expected to have a population of about 3,500.[67] Therefore Gaskell's designation is appropriate especially as Hamley is 'the principal town of a small county'. However, having arrived at what can be seen to be an objective and accurate definition of a Gaskellian small provincial town, Mr Harrison, the newly appointed assistant surgeon, who has arrived hot foot from London, defies the

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work that can be done to complete the topography of this short story. The key literary point is that the need for a train journey engenders narrative drive thus moving the story forward.

[66] This is one convincing line of evidence that she took Knutsford as the model for her fictional provincial towns.

[67] Michael Carr, *New Patterns: Process and Change in Human Geography* (Walton-on-Thames: Nelson, 1997) 124. Carr includes a table of population figures for the urban hierarchy of S.W. Germany 'after Christaller,' the renowned human geographer who devised 'Central Place Theory' which is a model to describe and analyse urban hierarchies in the landscape. He carried out his primary research on the southern German plain. Berry who has followed up Christaller's work with his own study of Iowa reaches rather different population thresholds. B.J. Knapp, S.R.J. Ross and D.L.R. McCrae, *The Challenge of the Human Environment* (Harlow: Longman, 1989) 103. This proves the point that the theory can produce little more than a relative scale rather than absolute numerical values as the population of settlements at the same level in the hierarchy will vary according to their location and will fluctuate over time.

accepted classification by saying, 'Duncombe calls itself a town but I should call it a 'village' (*Mr H* 351). Through the perceptual filter of the metropolitan inhabitant, Gaskell ensures that the reader is aware that response to place is determined by familiarity, knowledge and experience and lies in the eye of the beholder. In this way, however, similar Gaskell's provincial towns may seem it must be remembered that they vary subtly according to the response of the character.[68]

Architectural and Spatial reality

Together with Fordham, (*Ruth)* Duncombe is the only town to possess architectural reality and physical townscape although it is seen through unfamiliar eyes.

> Duncombe calls itself a town, but I should call it a village. Really, looking from Jocelyn's, it is a very picturesque place. The houses are anything but regular; they may be mean in their details; but altogether they look well; they have not the flat unrelieved front which many towns of far more pretensions present. Here and there a bow-window— every now and then a gable, cutting up against the sky- occasionally a projecting upper storey—throws good effect of light and shadow along the street and they have a queer fashion of their own of colouring the whitewash of some of the houses with a sort of pink blotting-paper tinge, more like the stone of which Mayence is built than anything else. It may be very bad taste, but to my mind it gives a rich warmth to the colouring. Then, here and there a dwelling house has a court in front, with a grass plot on each side of the flagged walk and a large tree or two—limes or horse-chestnuts—which send their great, projecting upper branches over into the street, making round dry places of shelter on the pavement in the times of summer showers. (*Mr H* 351-2)

This is hardly an objective view, because the town is seen through the perceptual filter of a stranger but contains the detail typical of someone familiar with the townscape. Therefore the reader is left to wonder about the extent to which this response belongs to Mr Harrison.

In *Ruth* however, the reader is not left under any illusion as to the voice who speaks. Gaskell writes of the social changes which have taken place in Fordham and their implications for the townscape:

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[68] It has been noted in previous chapters, that land, sea and townscapes are seen through perceptual filters of both characters and narrator.

> The picturesqueness of those ancient streets has departed now [...] .when the county-town lost its attraction for the Astleys, the Dunstans, the Waverhams, how could it be supposed that the Domvilles, the Bextons, and the Wildes would continue to go and winter there in their second-rate houses, and with their increased expenditure? So the grand old houses stood empty awhile; and then the speculators ventured to purchase, and to turn deserted mansions into many smaller dwellings fitted for the professional men, or even [...] into shops! (*Ruth* 2-3).

These extracts highlight Gaskell's ability to select from her familiarity with Knutsford what was appropriate to demonstrate the evolution of the townscape which inspired these fictional re-creations. Both portraits contain social overtones, but Mr Harrison is prepared to accept at face value the potential bad taste which exists in the town, and because he appears to appreciate the presence of the natural environment gives the reader the sense that he will adapt to his new life in the town. Ruth, on the other hand, caught up in the changing social revolution, works as a seamstress within one of the converted grand houses. Although socially remote from these surroundings, ironically, her destiny will be intimately connected to the 'grand' world epitomised by these converted houses.

Like Austen's Highbury and Eliot's Middlemarch there is little spatial reality or mappable geographical locations in any of her provincial townscapes. Hollingford perhaps possesses the most because it is the best developed portrait of a provincial town: 'The little straggling town faded away into country on one side close to the entrance-lodge of a great park'(*WD* 2). Apart from this single comment about Hollingford's linear morphology, there is little which is mappable. Three street names are mentioned, none of which are given spatial reality, but all of which are dramatically significant as they the sites of apparently clandestine meetings between Molly and Mr Preston. These encounters form the focus of the gossip which culminates in Molly's impugned reputation. 'The Park Avenue' is self-explanatory and can be assumed from its name to be 'the avenue leading from the park lodge up to the Towers.' Assuming that Hollingford is modelled on Knutsford and the location of Cumnor Towers on Tatton Hall, this avenue was lined by beech trees planted in 1737. On a nineteenth-century map of Tatton Park a distinct bend is visible in the

tree-lined road.[69] It is in this avenue that Cynthia suggested Molly should meet

Preston:

> But there was a bend in the avenue about a quarter of a mile from the lodge; after that bend it was a straight line to the great house, [...] . Molly did not like going quite out of sight of the lodge and she stood facing it, close by the trunk of one the trees. (*WD* 503)

Gaskell's use of her detailed knowledge of the tree-lined avenue enables her to create dramatic authenticity and tension, as the shelter of the tree meant that Preston mistook Molly for Cynthia and therefore was initially unprepared when faced with his lover's half-sister. Here Molly, against her better judgement which has been formed in the Hollingford environment, is acting on Cynthia's behalf. The latter's moral judgement and values on the other hand, are derived from a school beyond, and alien to, the town.

Pearson's Lane and Heath Lane are also directly or indirectly associated with meetings between Cynthia and Preston. However, there is no corroborating evidence in Pigot's directory that Knutsford possessed lanes with the above names.[70] Gaskell may have used these fictitious names to add realism, but as they have no originals, unlike the addresses she uses in London and in the Manchester of *Mary Barton,* they fail to make Hollingford mappable. However, they play an important role in the narrative structure, for they provide realistic conduits of movement for the characters which, in turn, generate narrative drive.

Functional Status

However, as it was Gaskell's intention to depict 'country town life' rather than mappable entities, she concentrated on social interaction rather than spatial relationships. Much of the social interaction in a small-town environment occurs in

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[69] The Park Avenue was planted with beeches and was known appropriately as the 'Beech Avenue.' A far more circuitous route has superseded this road although the original line of trees is still preserved as 'Broad Walk' and the bend is easily discernible. Cheshire County Council, *Tatton Park: The Gardens 6. Cheshire,* map Sheet XXVII.9 *Twenty five inches to one mile* (Southampton: Ordnance Survey, 1877).

[70] Pigot and Co, *General Classified and Street Directory for Manchester and Salford* (Manchester, 1829).

public places, so the functions which Gaskell depicted were selected carefully for their strategic importance to the plot. Not all her fictional creations were county towns, and even if they were they did not necessarily have assize courts. In *A Dark Night's Work,* Hamley was the county town but the assize courts where Dixon was tried and imprisoned were located at Hellingford. Fordham, like Knutsford, was an assize town although Gaskell does not say whether it was the county town (Knutsford was not, although it was the principal town of East Cheshire). The fact that Fordham possessed assize courts meant that county families rented town houses so that they could attend the assizes and the associated assemblies. (The latter occasion played a deterministic role in Ruth's destiny). Although Hollingford it is not the 'county town', and does not have, either courts or a prison, unlike Knutsford, nevertheless the town possesses a range of functions including a bookseller, a rather 'down-market' dressmaker, a market place, assembly rooms and it is a staging post.[71] Each of these services are a focus of action within the novel and as such provide an impetus to its narrative drive and a means of demonstrating Hollingford's provincialism.

Retail Services

The town is a retail centre where 'ladies' walk or travel by carriage to shop. However there is no indication of the range of shops which Hollingford offers, apart from the dressmaker and Johnson's the draper, who is located opposite Grinstead's the bookseller. Although the location of Grinstead's is not specified, his shop is the social focus of the town for he provides a subscription library service known as the Hollingford Book Society for the town's residents as well as 'most of the county families in the neighbourhood.'[72] As the 'centre of news and gossip, the club as it were' (*WD* 521), was an appropriate place for Molly to 'bump into' Preston which enabled her to return his loan on Cynthia's behalf, an action which did not go

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[71] Reference to Pigot's directory indicates that there were a range of functions of skills and services fulfilling the basic needs of the local population. Pigot's *Directory*, 28-29.

[72] Chapple describes the fact that Knutsford had 'its a little Book Club'. Chapple, *The Early Years* 167. Grinstead's has parallels with Fosters, 'the shop of Monkshaven' because both occupy socio-spatial centrality in their respective novels.

unobserved. The subsequent gossip resulted in Molly's impugned reputation, her father's disquiet and attempt to rectify the matter, and Lady Harriet's actions which salvaged the situation and restored Molly to her former respected status in the town. These events are determined by the central location of Grinstead's, thus linking inextricably the place with narrative structure and drive and ultimately with Molly's destiny.

Also both services, the bookshop and the dressmaker, carry provincial overtones. Gaskell stresses the pretensions and hypocrisy which accompanies membership of the Book Society, which does not include tradesmen. The value system is clearly indicated as Gaskell pokes gentle fun at the pretentiousness of the 'genteel' who comprise a distinguishable social class within Gaskell's provincial towns. The apotheosis of this group is realised in Cranford:

> Everybody who pretended to gentility in the place belonged to it. It was a test of gentility, indeed, rather than of education or a love of literature. No shopkeeper would have thought of offering himself as a member [...] while it boasted upon the list of subscribers most of the county families in the neighbourhood, some of whom subscribed to the Hollingford Book Society as a sort of duty belonging to their station, without often using the privilege of reading the books: while there were residents [...] such as Mrs Goodenough who privately thought reading a great waste of time[...] but who nevertheless belonged to it as a mark of station. (*WD* 521-522)

Miss Rose, the town's dressmaker, was succeeded by a 'very smart dressmaker' from the county town to make Molly's bridesmaid's dress for her father's wedding as it was universally agreed the 'plaid' which had been chosen for her visit to Hamley lacked taste. Clearly throughout her writings, Gaskell conveys the distinct impression that bad taste is an index of 'provincialism.'[73]

Cranford also has a draper's shop named Johnson's, which played a deterministic role as within its portals as 'an honest looking man' was unable to purchase a shawl for his wife due to the financial failure of the local 'Town and Country' bank. This initiated a

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[73] See page 325 for Mr Harrison's response to the bad taste in the physical townscape of Duncombe.

string of financial crises, not least of which was the loss of Miss Matty's savings. A period of retrenchment was necessary, followed by the establishment of the shop selling tea in her front room, in order to survive. Even in her early stories of provincial life Gaskell demonstrated the consequences of, and responses to, socio-economic change. Miss Matty adapted commendably to her straitened circumstances and was rewarded by the return of Peter, her brother, from India. His advent meant that she could close the shop as they had enough to live upon 'very genteelly at Cranford' (*C* 153)[74]

Assembly Rooms

Gaskell's provincial towns of Hamley, Cranford, Hollingford and Fordham fit Girouard's classification that 'by the 1770's all but the smallest towns had assembly rooms'. [75] They represent the 'public sphere' and play a strategic role in the novels in which they appear because they are foci of social interaction. In fact, an in-depth study of Gaskell's detailed depiction of assembly rooms and their events reveal that she is social historian in the guise of creative writer. Assembly rooms may have been purpose-built or, as in the case of Hamley 'an excrescence built on to the principal inn in the town' (*ADNW* 3). In Cranford the entrance to the assembly rooms was under the carriageway, at the rear of the George Inn. Gaskell uses the real name of the inn in Knutsford, giving the reader a clear indication of the inspiration for the location. The carriageway is still in existence, although subsequent building has perhaps masked the fact that the assembly rooms were clearly considered architecturally incompatible with the rest of the building by Gaskell and/or those she knew. [76]

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[74] Although there is a John Johnson in King Street, the main commercial street in Knutsford, selling sundries, it is likely that the inspiration for her tradesmen came from someone like Joseph Jackson who was tea dealer, grocer and linen draper rolled into one, which was typical of the time. Pigot's *Directory,* (1829) 28. However, identification of these potential models for inspiration is of limited importance, despite the fact that Knutsford is now packaged as 'Cranford' for tourists who try to identify all the shops of her novels. Of far greater significance is the portrait of the town as a 'social milieu' rather than spatial reality.

[75] Mark Girouard *The English Town* (Yale: Yale UP, 1992) 134. See also Chapter 3 149.

[76] This has been noted from personal observation of the George Inn at Knutsford.

'A number of assembly rooms were paid for by subscribers' as was Knutsford's 'decent assembly and card room in the eighteenth century' according to Girouard and Chapple.[77] Gaskell portrays a similar provenance in both *A Dark Night's Work* and *Cranford* as all the county families had jointly subscribed to the assembly room and card room. In the latter case, Gaskell endorses the date given by Chapple when she writes that the rooms had been 'added to the inn about a hundred years before' (*C* 85. The action in Cranford took place in the 1840's).

Customarily, monthly assemblies were held in the winter (as in Cranford) but they might also take place on special occasions like race-week which also occurred in Cranford or during the assizes as in the Fordham of *Ruth.* Monthly assemblies were held at the time of the full moon so those attending were able to be guided home by the moonlight:[78]

> The lofty roof was indistinct for the lamps were not fully lighted; yet while through the richly-painted Gothic window at one end the moonbeams fell, many-tinted, on the floor, and mocked with their vividness the struggles of the artificial light to illuminate its little sphere. (*Ruth* 13)

Sometimes, unlike the social historian, who documents and tells the reader, Gaskell conveys information by dramatically integrating it into the story. In other instances, she wears the social historian's hat and tells the reader that 'society [...] met at every full moon in the Hamley assembly-room' (*ADNW* 3).

Attendance at assemblies were usually open to all and, according to Girouard: 'in country towns the bread-and-butter of assemblies was provided by the town gentry, the polite society of attorneys, doctors, clergymen, prosperous merchants and people of private means whose main house was in the town.'[79] However, he also quotes John Byng who, when staying at the George at Knutsford in 1790, was told of the

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[77] Girouard, *The English Town* 136; Chapple, *The Early Years* 126.
[78] Girouard 130.
[79] Girouard 134.

assemblies there 'at which the maid bragged that none but the gentility were admitted: and on no account any tradesmen.'[80]

Both of these observations seem to hold true of Gaskell's knowledge of such events and the nuances of social class differentiation. Those attending the Charity Ball in Hollingford are careful to point out the butcher of Coreham, and Cynthia's dance with an attorney's clerk. Molly even dances with the Coreham bookseller, much to Mrs Gibson's chagrin:

> 'Look, look! that's our Mr Cholmley, the magistrate' (he was the great man of Coreham), 'and that's Mrs Cholmley in red satin [...] . And there is Coxe the butcher and his wife! Why all Coreham seems to be here!' [...]
> Oh! I see so many people here that I know. There are Mr and Mrs Smeaton and that nice good-tempered daughter.'
> Oh! booksellers and butchers if you will'. [...]
> Mrs Gibson leaned forwards, and said to her daughter,—
> 'Your last partner was a gentleman, my dear. You are improving in your selection. I was really ashamed of you before, figuring away with that attorney's clerk. Molly, do you know whom you have been dancing with? I have found out he is the Coreham bookseller.'
> 'That accounts for his being so well up in the books I have been wanting to hear about,' said Molly, eagerly.(*WD* 298-301)

So these events become the butt of Gaskell's gentle but ironic humour as she interweaves these scenes into the text as narrative vehicles for drawing attention to the pretentiousness of provincial communities.

Girouard draws attention to the importance of the attendance by the local aristocracy. 'The local aristocracy came to the summer balls and caused excitement by putting in an occasional appearance in the winter.'[81] However, in both Hamley and Hollingford the lord-lieutenant's parties arrive 'shamefully late' (*WD* 305) and were the cause of great disappointment. Disappointingly for the assembled townspeople of the three towns, the Duchess of Monteith wore 'not a vestige of a jewel or a diamond'(*WD* 304) and the lord-lieutenant's party in Hamley proceed to waltz, a 'new-fashioned dance' for which there were 'a lack of gentlemen' who were acquainted with it!(*ADNW* 4).

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[80] Girouard 134.
[81] Girouard 134.

Whilst poking fun at the pretensions of those in 'genteel' society, Gaskell makes clear that there was more to assemblies than gawping at the local aristocracy. Their main purposes were to educate the young and older people in the social virtues and were a means to meeting a suitable partner with a view to marriage.[82] However, 'Mr Wilkins' foible was that he wished to introduce his daughter Ellinor into society 'above her natural sphere' at the Hamley assembly (*ADNW* 36). Mrs Gibson's social pretentiousness is revealed when she uses the Hollingford Charity Ball as the occasion on which her girls 'will come out' into fashionable society (*WD* 246), even though it is merely a local rather than a grand metropolitan event.

There are times at these assemblies when, although there is no intention of creating an opportunity for two people to meet and form a liaison, it can happen by chance. The meeting between Ruth and Bellingham occurred at the Fordham assembly, because ladies dresses are frequently torn whilst dancing and Ruth, who was there as a seamstress, repaired the offending garment. Therefore, it can be argued therefore that what happened depended upon where it happened.[83] This place, the occasion,and the chance meeting were to play a significant role in determining Ruth's destiny.

In addition to their social function, assemblies were also used for political canvassing.[84] Gaskell, presumably from personal experience, was aware of this. Lord Hollingford had to attend the Charity Ball for precisely this reason as it was being held just before the county elections. He, as the prospective parliamentary candidate, was persuaded by his sister to dance with some of the townspeople in order to keep 'the vassals' satisfied and loyal because 'there's an election in June' (*WD* 309).

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[82] Girouard 132.

[83] This thesis is exactly what Moretti stressed in his study of the importance of place in the nineteenth century European novel. Moretti 70.

[84] Girouard 132.

The architectural detail of Gaskell's assembly rooms is rather sparse, but clearly the modest Knutsford assembly rooms did not resemble the finest in the land. In Fordham, the rooms were 'old', 'magnificent' and 'vast'. It was so large that objects showed dim at the further end [...] . Full length figures of county worthies hung around [...] . The lofty roof was indistinct for the lamps were not fully lighted; yet' (*Ruth*13). Present day evidence of the interior of the ballroom in Knutsford endorses the architectural model of John Wood's ballroom in Bath which:

> combined the scale and architectural disposition of a great hall with something of the gaiety and glitter of a drawing-room. The orchestra was placed in its traditional position in a first-floor gallery [...] . The room [...] was divided into two architectural zones [...] . The lower was embellished with fireplaces, festooned overmantels and mirrors. The zone above was dominated by a recess for musicians [...] . [85]

However, during the 'first half of the nineteenth century few flourished for more than a few decades and in the second half of the century they were closing down all over England.'[86]

Therefore the hey-day of assemblies was past before Gaskell was old enough to be fully aware of them, although it can be assumed that she, like Molly, went to such events as a young girl of sixteen or seventeen in 1826 or 1827. (Certainly her cousins would have attended judging by the evidence Chapple produces of life in Knutsford at the time.)[87] The decline is made clear in several of her works in various guises which evoke the sense of decline far more evocatively than Girouard, whose statement documents rather than dramatises. Once again the difference between social historian and creative writer is highlighted, although it has to be argued that Gaskell as a

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[85] Girouard 139.

[86] Girouard 144.

[87] Chapple, *The Early Years* 109. He suggests that 'Knutsford Unitarians were able to socialise with Cheshire gentry in the neighbourhood and with other local families who were members of the established church'. He quotes a festive occasion in 1811, when there had been 'very gay masquerading at Knutsford among the Toft family'. During the course of his study of 'her early years', Chapple makes it clear that Gaskell moved in professional middle class circles in the Knutsford of her childhood and would have part of the social milieu which included the county gentry. He explains that they were an enterprising group the implication of which is that they were not constrained by money or the limits of mobility and travel because there was no railway in Knutsford. Chapple 179.

creative writer is encompassing both roles. Physical deterioration in the decor is evident from the description of the Cranford assembly rooms: 'The old room was dingy; the salmon coloured paint had faded into a drab; great pieces of plaster had chipped off the white wreaths and festoons on its walls' (*C* 85). The intimate detail of this picture indicates a personal familiarity with the place. Physical deterioration is emphasised by social decline as the use of these rooms had changed. Girouard in his record of the decline and closure of assembly room states that 'if they survived' it was through changing their use, as was the case in Cranford where the assembly rooms were used for such attractions as 'Wombwell's lions' and Signor Brunoni's Magic Show. The aristocracy did not attend the latter event so that Mary's party who represent the genteel society of the town were able to sit 'in aristocratic seclusion' (*C* 86) on the front row! In Hamley the decline is indicated by changes in the dances. Girouard recounts how, in their hey-day, assemblies began with minuets which 'gave way to country dances at eight o' clock.'[88] By the time,

> the old original founders of the Hamley assemblies were dropping off; minuets had vanished with them, country dances had died away; and quadrilles were in high vogue–nay, one or two of the high magnates of –shire were trying to introduce waltzing as they had seen it in London. (*ADNW* 3)

From this evidence it is clear that Gaskell proves to be both social historian and social geographer through her portraits of assemblies. Her ability to weave social history into her creative writing can be summarised by her use of two outstanding phrases. In Cranford 'still a mouldy odour of aristocracy lingered about' the declining Assembly rooms as Miss Matty and Mrs Forrester, members of the genteel society, 'entered' (*C* 86). In Hollingford because the 'lord-lieutenant's party from the Towers were unusually late, and the aristocratic ozone was absent from the atmosphere and there was a flatness about the dancing of all those who considered themselves above the plebeian ranks of the tradespeople' (*WD* 299). The images of the aristocracy who create their own atmosphere perfectly encapsulate Gaskell's gentle jibing at the

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[88] Girouard 128.

hierarchical nature of the society at the centre of her provincial novels and short stories. Undoubtedly the assemblies are part of life in these towns and therefore are integral to the narrative structure and drive, as they play a deterministic role as well as exposing the pretensions of provincial society. For Ellinor was not accepted by the higher echelons of Hamley society, nor did she meet a future husband from amongst its ranks, whereas Ruth's destiny was, in part, shaped and determined by her encounter with Bellingham at the assembly in Fordham.

Transport

Gaskell's provincial novels could be classified according to the presence or absence of the railway as she uses the railway as an index of time and place. However, her interest lies in the socio-economic change engendered by the railway, that technological innovation, which transformed both the landscape of Britain and the lives of its inhabitants from 1830 onwards.[89] In both *Cousin Phillis* and *A Dark Night's Work* the advent of the railway produces the narrative dynamic as it determines and controls narrative drive. (Its literary significance with reference to these two works will be discussed in the concluding section of the chapter.) The focus of attention here is Gaskell's pre-railway provincial town in which both public and private means of transport are found. Not only does she use transport to generate narrative drive, but the variety of vehicles appears to symbolise the hierarchical nature of provincial town society.

Apart from canals, public transport was limited to road travel at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Knutsford had been by-passed by the canal system, so canals do not appear in her provincial writings, instead the focus is upon road travel as the characters walk, ride or travel by a variety of wheeled vehicles. Radiating from Knutsford was a series of turnpike roads maintained by the tolls paid for by the users.

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89 The railway had a major impact on the socio-economic geography of Britain. Sidney Smith wrote of its advent, 'Everything is near, everything is immediate, time distance and delay are abolished'. Having quoted Smith, Simmons continues by explaining that although its speed was 'its most spectacular characteristic, it was also cheaper than coach travel. 'But most important of all it changed the *whole scale of human movement.* It gave the ordinary man in England a new freedom to move.' Jack Simmons, *Transport* (London: Vista, 1962). 44-45.

Professor Darby quotes Henry Holland, who in his *General View of Agriculture, 1808* comments that by this date, 'the roads in Cheshire were in a state of progressive improvement' because stone was being brought from Mow Cop (in Staffordshire), Flintshire and Anglesey.[90] By the late 1820's the time of the setting of *Wives and Daughters,* McAdam's surfacing techniques had been introduced, hence the 'paved lanes'[91] of Gaskell's rural landscapes which play both a realistic and symbolic role in the novel. The sound of horses hooves as Mr Gibson (he invariably travels on horseback to complete his rounds) leaves Molly at Hamley is a recurrent image which serves to highlight Molly's sense of abandonment. In *My Lady Ludlow* Gaskell depicts a major route as a muddy by-road which may be the way she remembered the Warwickshire of her childhood:

> After we left the Chase, the road grew worse. No one in these days, who has not seen the byroads of fifty years ago, can imagine what they were. We had to quarter [...] nearly all the way along deep-rutted, miry lanes; [...] . The road was too muddy for me to walk without dirtying myself more than I liked to do [...] . (*MLL* 6)[92]

However, there are un-negotiable, muddy lanes within the built up area of Cranford which create amusing scenes and drive the narrative forward.[93]

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[90] H.C. Prince, 'England circa 1800,' *A Historical Geography of England after 1600* ed. H.C. Darby (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986) 155.

[91] McAdam introduced hard surfaces for roads that consisted of small stones broken to size on a well-drained foundation. Simmons, plate 82 after page 69. Of course these improved road surfaces were the reason that it became possible to travel all the year round. Prior to the early nineteenth century travel had been limited to the spring and summer when the roads were passable.

[92] Slater explains that heavy use of the main routes meant that many of them were in 'appalling condition and were often impassable for long periods in the winter' Terry Slater, *A History of Warwickshire* (Chichester: Phillimore, 1997) 94.

[93] Miss Pole persuades the sedan chair carriers to take the soft muddy route along Headingley Causeway from Mrs Forrester's house to Cranford rather than Darkness Lane which was paved and 'jolted Miss Matty so' (*C* 150). Causeways were built above the general level of the road in order to provide a route that could be used perennially. Simmons, plate 72 after page 69. Henry Holland makes this point in 1818. 'Every by-lane where carts can scarcely force their way is provided for the accommodation of horse and foot passengers along which they may travel with expedition and safety at every season of the year'. Henry Holland, *A General View of the Agriculture in Cheshire.* (London,1808) 304. It would seem that the opposite is true in this case and that the soft mud of the causeway was Miss Pole's preferred route for Miss Matty. The paradox could be an integral part of Gaskell's ironic humour at the expense of these provincial 'Amazons'.

In the 1820's, the hey-day of the stage coach, this vehicle was the principal means of public transport and speeds of travel were being reduced all the time by virtue of road improvements.[94] Gaskell's awareness of this is built into the fabric of her fiction. As Mrs Goodenough observes during conversation with Molly and Mr Gibson:

> 'We've just been seeing my wife and her daughter off to London. Mrs Gibson has gone up for a week!'
> 'Deary, deary, to London, and only for a week! Why, I can remember its being three days journey! (*WD* 461)

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the journey time between London and Birmingham had been reduced to fifteen hours. Miss Browning is aware of the telescoping of distance for she comments that it is only a day's journey from Hollingford to London (*WD* 464).[95]

Like most provincial towns, Hollingford was a staging post and the town's comings and goings focused on the George Inn, the name of the real inn in Knutsford. Stages such as 'The 'Bang-up', the 'Umpire' and the 'Aurora' called at Knutsford en route between London and the large provincial towns of the north like Manchester and Liverpool. Gaskell uses real coaches and the real inn in Knutsford in W*ives and Daughters* to add realism and veracity as well narrative drive to the tale. In this novel, with one exception, times and service are accurate. Roger leaves Hollingford for London in the evening and the 'Umpire' called at the George each day at 6 o' clock for London. Mr Henderson, Cynthia's future husband arrived on the 'up' coach in the middle of the day from London. However, Mr Gibson thought he and Cynthia would catch the 'Bang-up' for London in the evening, but that service went to Birmingham not London, and it arrived in the town at midday.[96] It is possible that Gaskell may

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[94] Harris points out that coaches were able to travel at nine or ten miles per hour. Darby, 201. Such developments telescoped distances in terms of time, a development of which Gaskell is aware.

[95] Terry Slater *A History of Warwickshire,* (Chichester: Phillimore, 1997) 96-97. Slater endorses Mrs Goodenough's observation that the travelling time between London and Birmingham was 36 hours in the middle of the 18c and had been reduced to fifteen hours, 'even in winter' by the end of the century. By '1837, the Holyhead Mail could complete the journey in 11 hours and 8 minutes.' This was accomplished not only by improved roads and means of transport but also due to increased competition, better techniques of road repair and travel after dark becoming possible.

[96] Pigot's *Directory*, (1829) 29.

not have checked the facts, as the novel was written in instalments to a monthly deadline. Despite the comings and goings, the narrative remains firmly fixed in Hollingford preserving its nodal structure whilst Gaskell weaves the social history of the time into her unfolding drama.

She appears to locate the George Inn in the market place which she fondly imagines to be the central nucleus of the town, a focus for arrivals and departures. In fact, Chapple points out 'Knutsford never had a settled market' although 'early photographs show livestock being traded where the road widened outside the White Bear Inn'[97] which was located at the end of the town in which Gaskell lived with her aunt.[98]

It seems that Gaskell designed and manipulated the geography of Knutsford to create fictional space for her artistic purposes just as she had manipulated the topography to create a fictional geography for *Wives and Daughters.* Through the use of this particular central spot in the town she was able to highlight one of Mrs Gibson's foibles. Although Molly and her father happily wave off Mrs Gibson and Cynthia when they travel to London, Mrs Gibson steadfastly refuses to make public displays of emotion either when her daughter Cynthia arrives in Hollingford or when her husband leaves for London. 'I don't like to expose my feelings to every passer-by' and 'I hate scenes in the market-place' (*WD* 223) are two of the comments passed by Mrs Gibson on this subject for 'leave-taking in the market-place was quite out of the bounds of Mrs Gibson's sense of propriety'(*WD* 514). Undoubtedly Mrs Gibson is the butt of Gaskell's ironic humour as, in this instance, paradoxically, it is the pretentious outsider who is imbued with a sense of propriety. In Cranford it is the inhabitants of that provincial town who possess such sensitivity to behaviour appropriate to the occasion, whereas Molly and her father are totally relaxed about saying farewell to Mrs Gibson and Cynthia as they depart for London. Gaskell demonstrates what she perceives as the inextricable link between the place, its inhabitants and their values

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[97] Chapple, *The Early Years* 125.

[98] Pigot lists the White Bear as one of the staging posts for the London coach known as the 'Aurora' rather than the 'Umpire' which is mentioned in the novel. Pigot's *Directory*, (1829) 29.

through the interwoven subtly of such scenes. Although there might be the appearance of an axial movement of the action to London, it is only characters (and none of them are the protagonist) that move. The latter stays firmly entrenched in Hollingford.

Other forms of public transport which appear in Gaskell's provincial writings are more modest and are used for shorter journeys. 'Flys', which are one horse carriages with collapsible roofs, are hired conveyances, the early nineteenth century equivalent of the taxi.[99] Ralph Corbet takes a fly from Hamley when he is summoned to his family home, Stokely Castle. This light transport would have taken him to the nearest staging post, as the railway did not come to Hamley until later in the story. As the reader does not follow Ralph on his journey home, the details of his mode of transport, once he has reached home, are not specified.

Lower down the public transport scale are sedan chairs for individual use during inclement weather, when the roads are very muddy or the person is infirm. Cranford, like Knutsford, possessed only one sedan chair which was used by Miss Matty ('for it was she who was voted into the chair, as she had a cold'), on the occasion of the evening invitation to Mrs Forrester's to celebrate her wedding anniversary(*C* 97). For local visits Hollingford possessed a superior form of transport, which was used for special local visits when more than one person required transport. This was a 'yellow post-chaise' used to convey the Gibsons to Ashcombe on the occasion of the wedding between the surgeon and Hyacinth Kirkpatrick.[100] These vehicles were 'hired travelling carriages with seats for one or two people in which the driver rode one of the horses'.[101] Once again, Gaskell's ironic sense of humour seems pointed at

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[99] Suzanne Lewis, notes, *A Dark Night's Work* by Elizabeth Gaskell (Oxford: Oxford UP 1992) 308.

[100] Easson comments that 'yellow' was a 'fast', fashionable colour, one which might be more expected in a metropolitan environment than a provincial town. He continues by suggesting that the fact that Hollingford possessed only one such vehicle is an index of its 'slowness' or provincialism. Easson, notes, 702. This paradox, which carries Gaskellian tones of irony, would have been evident to readers familiar with Knutsford and other provincial towns.

[101] Simmons, plate 68 after page 69. The photograph shows a post chaise.

Hyacinth Kirkpatrick who is taking a rather grand, long distance vehicle for what might be seen as a relatively short journey! [102]

Private transport not only ensures mobility for the population of Gaskell's stories but it also reflects the hierarchical nature of provincial society. At the lowest end of the spectrum, the working population and many of the 'genteel society' of Hollingford, Duncombe and Cranford would have walked about the towns and their environs. Some of the professional middle-class population were able to ride, and this mode of transport transcended the class divisions and was often related to expediency, professional necessity and leisure activity. Mr Gibson and Mr Preston rode because the peripatetic nature of their profession demanded a certain degree of mobility. The aristocracy rode partly because it was the only way to cover their vast acreage for administrative purposes and partly because hunting was an integral part of their life-style. Whilst the middle classes might own a dog cart or a gig (Mr Wilkins the Hamley lawyer possessed a dog cart before aspiring to a brougham, but Mr Gibson seems to have no form of private transport other than horses, for he has to borrow a dog cart), carriage ownership was an index of aristocracy. An index of Squire Hamley's financial and concomitant social decline is 'the old carriage which fell to pieces in the cob-webbed seclusion of the coach-house'.[103] Once again Gaskell combines her role of social historian with creative writer in her evocative description of the Hamley carriage. Until they moved to Plymouth Grove, the Gaskells had not owned a carriage and it seems that Aunt Lumb, with whom Gaskell lived with as a child in Knutsford, did not possess one. Carriages and their ownership figure strongly in Gaskell's provincial fiction, especially in *Wives and Daughters,* so it may be assumed that Gaskell, like Mrs Gibson, adored carriages for the privacy and social

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[102] There seems no evidence that Knutsford possessed a yellow post-chaise. Certainly the remaining sedan chair was yellow in colour which was an irony, judging by Easson's comment, for such a 'slow' means of transport.

[103] Molly's first visit to Hamley was made in the 'luxury' of their carriage, so it can be assumed that the decline in the Hamley fortunes coincided with Osborne's failure at Cambridge and his related indebtedness.

prestige that they afforded (Gaskell also must have appreciated the independence that they afforded as well). Mrs Gibson had aspirations to membership of the upper echelons of society and derived enormous pleasure from travelling in the Cumnor Towers carriage as such a ride gave her a sense of 'aristocratic grandeur' and allowed her to pretend that she had achieved her ambition. Consequently she was envious of her daughter's 'brougham and man' in London when she was left with life in 'a little country town with three servants, and 'no carriage', a source of considerable disappointment to her (*WD* 681).

Girouard points out that in the pre-railway era in Britain only the aristocracy would have been mobile. He suggests that towns like Hollingford and her other provincial towns would have been remote, and that the majority of the population would not have moved far beyond their immediate environs, partly because the roads were poor and partly because of the very high cost of stage coach transport.[104] In fact the narrative drive of the novel partly depends on the seasonal movement of the aristocratic Cumnors rather than the more infrequent movements of middle-class families.

Social Structure

The hierarchical structure of provincial society is a major structural element in Gaskell's fiction in *A Dark Night's Work, My Lady Ludlow* and especially in *Wives and Daughters.* Like Hamley (*ADNW),* Hollingford is surrounded by country estates owned by the local aristocracy and gentry. The links between town and country families are close in both places because these links are inextricably part of their individual plots. Mr Wilkins dined at county dinner tables, purchased a coat-of-arms, and hired a clerk in his attempt to join the higher echelons of society. The son of 'nobody knows who', meant that not only were his ambitions were thwarted but became his undoing. 'The shears of fate' (*ADNW* 129) determined by the social hierarchy in which Mr Wilkins lived took the form of an violent outburst on Dunster

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[104] Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House* (London: Book Club Associates, 1978) 7.

which proved fatal. In contrast, Ralph Corbet, whose 'father goes up to the Plantagenets for his pedigree', was 'clutched' (was accepted with alacrity) at by the 'country people in this precisely Boeotian –shire' (*ADNW* 27). Lord Cumnor is not only the owner of the land on which Hollingford is built, but Hollingford society and its economy is founded on the patronage of this aristocratic family.[105] In contrast, Squire Hamley, whose family heritage extends into the mists of historical time, although a member of the country gentry, is lower in the social hierarchy because he possesses less land, has a smaller house and fewer financial resources. Throughout the novel, the financial viability of his entailed estate helps to drive the narrative forward and determine destiny. The role played by these families and their social realms in the novel will be discussed more fully during the course of the argument. The population of Gaskell's towns also contains representatives of the professional middle classes such as, doctors, lawyers and clergymen, who hold positions of responsibility.[106] There are invariably widowers with children. For instance, Mr Gibson, the town surgeon in Hollingford has one daughter, Molly. In Hamley, the town's lawyer, Mr Wilkins has a daughter, Ellinor and the vicar of Duncombe has three daughters, the eldest of whom is Sophy and one son, Walter. Both Walter and Sophy are crucial to the narrative drive of *Mr Harrison's Confessions*. By virtue of their peripatetic professions these men play a strategic role because, as they move round the towns and surrounding countryside, they engender and control narrative drive.

One aspect of the social structure which is unique in nineteenth-century fiction is the population composition of Cranford, Duncombe and Hollingford. In these three towns

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[105] It seems widely accepted that the Egerton family who owned Tatton Hall was the inspiration for the Cumnors. However, it would seem from her extensive acquaintance with upper middle class and aristocratic families around the country that the relationship between the family in the 'big house' and the town was familiar to her.

[106] Girouard comments on the social structure of Georgian towns and describes the same social composition as that of Gaskell's fictitious provincial towns. 'The best houses in country towns were built by a town establishment, of doctors attorneys, clergymen, bankers, merchants, rich shopkeepers and people of private means, all of whose main house was in the town'. Mark Girouard, *Town and Country* (New Haven and London: Yale UP 1992) 256.

'householders above a certain rank are women'(*C* 1; *Mr H* 357). These words appear in both *Cranford* and *Mr Harrison's Confessions* and the point is emphasised by describing Cranford as a town 'in possession of the Amazons' in the opening sentence (*C* 1) and by the inclusion of 'a curious statistical fact' that 'five sixths' of the population of Duncombe is composed of women(*Mr H* 357). Hollingford's genteel society appears to have a population similarly composed of spinsters and widows. According to Girouard, Gaskell's description was 'an exaggeration, but not an absurd one.'

> Widows and spinsters provided another element in polite society. Mrs Gaskell's description of Cranford [...] was based on her childhood experience of Knutsford in the 1820's: [...] . Such ladies could be the widows or unmarried daughters of country house owners, merchants or professional people, who had been left with an annuity charged on their husband's or father's estates, rent from town property or holding in the funds.[107]

This section of the population is structurally crucial to the stories, for these women are the means by which news travels round the close-knit communities; their houses are the centre of gossip and the foci of visiting, which is the principal social activity within these towns: 'The charm of a little town is that everyone is so sympathetically full of the same events.' Mr Harrison's initial rather naive response to Duncombe demonstrates Gaskell's intention to maintain a veneer of gentle ironic humour in her portrait of these towns as sympathetic sharing of news develops into gossip and, in some cases, ultimately into scandal. As Duncombe's 'skeins of gossip', which emanate from Mrs Munton's drawing room, are woven into scandal and begin to tighten round Frank Harrison, his beloved Sophy is removed from what appears to be his malign influence. Hollingford, too, has its 'centre of gossip' in Mrs Goodenough's home, although in this town the gossiping women and town appear to be synonymous judging by Chapter 46 the title of which is 'Hollingford Gossips.' If 'gossip' was written with a lower case 'g', the word would be a verb implying that the town itself was doing the gossiping. Alternatively, if the 'g' is capitalised then it acts as a noun so

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[107] Girouard, *The English Town* 112-113.

the intention is to convey that it is townspeople, or perhaps, townswomen in particular who engage in gossip. Which ever way the chapter title is read, the message is clear that Hollingford is a 'tittle-tattle place' (*WD* 190). In the aforesaid chapter, before she dramatises the conversation of the inward-looking coterie of women who comprise the 'Hollingford Gossips', Gaskell cannot resist an authorial intrusion, just in case the reader is in any doubt about the nature of the place. She interjects with:

> Scandal sleeps in the summer, comparatively speaking. Its nature is the reverse of that of the dormouse. Warm ambient air, loiterings abroad, gardenings, flowers to talk about, and preserves to make, soothed the wicked imp to slumber in the parish of Hollingford in summer-time. But when evenings grew short, and people gathered round the fires, and put their feet in a circle–not on the fenders, that was not allowed–then it was the time for confidential conversation! Or in the pauses allowed for tea-trays to circulate among the card-tables [...] small crumbs and scraps of daily news came up to the surface [...] . (*WD* 524)

Indeed a major section of the plot hinges on the secrecy with which Cynthia conducts her relationship with Mr Preston and the gossip which is engendered by Molly's attempts to assist her half-sister to extricate herself from the tangled web she has woven. In her attempt to help, Molly is observed by the ladies who move about the town calling at Grinstead's, visiting and throwing card parties. Their movements and subsequent gossip about what they believe they have seen, as dramatised in Chapter 46, propels the story forward. Mrs Goodenough was burning to disclose a secret:

> 'I could tell her of a girl [...] , who's on the high road to matrimony; and in as cunning a way as ever I heerd on; going out at dusk to meet her sweetheart, [...].
> Every one around the table looked curious[…] , except the hostess, Mrs Dawes, who [...] said demurely,–
> 'I suppose you mean Mr Preston and Miss Gibson?'
> 'Why, who told you?' said Mrs Goodenough in surprise [...] . 'I never named her I'm sure'.
> 'No! But I know. I could tell my tale too,' continued Mrs Dawes.
> 'No! could you really?' said Mrs Goodenough, very curious and a little jealous.
> 'Yes. My uncle Sheepshanks came upon them in the Park Avenue,—he startled 'em a good deal, he said and when he taxed Mr Preston with being his sweetheart, he didn't deny it'

> 'Well! Now so much has come out, I'll tell you what I know [...].'(*WD* 527-528)

and so Mrs Goodenough goes on to describe how it was her Hannah's child that Molly had picked up after a fall prior to her surprise encounter with Mr Preston and Cynthia as they met secretly on Croston Heath. A little later Hannah had been asked for water for a 'lady' by Preston, and Mrs Goodenough has drawn the conclusion that the assignation was between Molly and Mr Preston. The dialogue builds to a climax as each woman adds more evidence to try to verify the story. However, when an anonymous member of the assembled company observes, 'I think it looks very bad for Miss Gibson'(*WD* 529), Mrs Goodenough ironically 'fired round on the speaker' (*WD* 529) to defend Molly's reputation and to defend her own account:

> 'Not at all bad, and I'll trouble you not to use such a word as that about Molly Gibson, as I've known all her life. [...] All as ever I said was that I was surprised at it in Molly Gibson; and that I'd ha' thought it was liker that pretty minx of a Cynthia [...]; indeed at one time I was ready to swear as it was her Mr Preston was after.' (*WD* 529)

During the course of these humorous, 'gossipy' interchanges, Gaskell alerts the reader to the social nuances and social determinism that, for her, were integral to this provincial environment. Mrs Dawes, who was new to the town, and 'wished to get into the genteelest of Hollingford society' could not afford to offend Miss Browning by disagreeing with her, for Miss Browning 'rather represented the selectest circle of the little town' (*WD* 526). Mrs Goodenough waited until she had departed before instigating the gossip. Although Mr Gibson was not born and bred in Hollingford, he married into its society and was clearly accepted before his remarriage. 'Style! very different style to what Bob Gibson, her husband was used to when he first came here,— glad of a mutton-chop in his surgery [...] we called him Bob Gibson then, but none of us dare Bob him now.' (*WD* 529) This is Mrs Goodenough's view of the effect of his new wife upon her doctor. Whilst Mr Gibson and Molly are accepted because of their appropriate values and standards of behaviour, Mrs Gibson, her daughter, and Mr Preston, remain on the social periphery of Hollingford.

Her portrait of fictional towns lacks details of economic activity, just as in Haworth Gaskell omitted the industrial sector of its economy and the working-class sector of its society, However, Knutsford had an industrial base of silk weaving which, although it never reached the levels of importance of Macclesfield, supported that town's silk manufacturing, as work was decentralised to Knutsford. Chapple writes, 'If Mrs Lumb and Elizabeth went through Silk Mill Street to reach the higher town, they would have been in a part of Knutsford that bore considerable resemblance to industrial areas of Cheshire and Lancashire.' The townscape reflected its economy. 'Cosy nooks there may have been but there were also homes and lodging houses without adequate sanitation and water supply, with leaking roofs, unflagged floors, overcrowded and sordid living conditions.'[108]

This picture does not figure in Gaskell's provincial towns, which are almost exclusively middle-class with servants appearing as necessary to service that sector of society. Gaskell was selective and ignored those aspects of the town which were not germane to the tale she wished to tell, a feature permissible in fiction but one which Barker does not appreciate in her biography.[109]

Indices of Provincialism

Cranford, with its population of 'Amazons', genteel society, practice of 'elegant economy', sense of propriety, social visiting, regular hours and unfashionable clothes, is the epitome of a provincial town according to Gaskell. However, it is possible to detect more than a trace of hyperbole in her portrait of Cranford which makes it less realistic than her portraits of other provincial towns. They are all depicted realistically as small, conservative, introverted, essentially kind with a cruel edge when gossip turns to scandal. Life runs on in a monotony of calm which, in some people's eyes can amount to 'dullness'. Into this domestic fabric Gaskell weaves change, both via the

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[108] Chapple, *The Early Years* 131-132.

[109] Barker implies that Gaskell allows her preconceptions of Haworth to create a distorted picture. A counter-argument is offered in Chapter 4 of this thesis. Barker 739.

skeins of gossip already discussed and through the arrival of outsiders who may attempt to disrupt the 'status quo'.

In *Wives and Daughters,* she focuses her narrative lens on just such domestic change effected by Mrs Gibson, whose pretentious actions threaten to marginalise Molly and ensure that she herself remains on the margins of Hollingford society.[110]

The daily rhythms and routines of provincial society are well established by Gaskell in all her stories, notably in *Cranford.*[111] Visiting hours are from twelve to three; tea and card parties take place in the early evening, beginning at six and finishing about nine o'clock. Evening refreshments were light: 'it was considered "vulgar" to give anything expensive in the way of eatable or drinkable at evening entertainments'(*C* 3). As the wife of a highly respected medical practitioner, Hyacinth Gibson had social status and was gratified by the calls 'from county families',- the higher echelons of society around the town - which occurred soon after her marriage (*WD* 183).

However, in order to maintain the professional routine of his household, Gibson and his apprentice doctors require a hot repast in the middle of the day. This meal coincides with the visits of 'high-born ladies, with noses of aristocratic refinement' (*WD* 183). The odour of 'hot, savoury smelling dishes' in conjunction with the inconvenience of carrying dirty plates from dining room to kitchen necessitated a change in domestic routine in the Gibson household. Mrs Gibson introduced the 'new-fangled notion of a six o'clock dinner' (*WD* 184), with the result that invitations to card and tea parties which were the life blood of Hollingford's social life dried up. None of the ladies felt they could invite the Gibsons to tea at the very time when they were eating their very late dinner:

> How ask people to tea at six, who dined at that hour? How, when they refused cake and sandwiches at half-past eight, how induce other people who were really hungry to commit a vulgarity before those calm and scornful eyes? So

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[110] Molly is marginalised socially but remains in the centre of the place unlike Esther whose prostitution both physically and socially marginalises her.

[111] Rhythms of all sorts generate narrative drive throughout her work, from the daily shifts at Manchester factories to the mealtime routines at Abermouth and the seasonal sailings of the whaling fleets in Monkshaven.

> So there had been a great lull of invitations for the Gibsons to Hollingford tea-parties. Mrs Gibson, whose object was to squeeze herself into 'county society' had taken this being left out of the smaller festivities with great equanimity; but Molly missed the kind homeliness of the parties to which she had gone as long as she could remember [...] .(*WD* 462-3)

Gaskell's belief in the inextricable link between the place and character which underpins her work is clear here as her quiet and subtle satire demonstrate that Hollingford's provincialism is a function of Hyacinth Gibson's pretentious perceptual filter and that for Molly such parties represented a homeliness which was valuable, valued and missed. Whilst Mrs Gibson's actions not only maintain her own peripheral social position, they also marginalise Molly so that when there is a question mark over Molly's relationship with Preston, the ladies gossip to impugn the girl's reputation because they felt distanced from her. For a time Molly became as ostracised as her step-mother.

Domestic interiors, fashions and hairstyles; none of these features of provincial life escape Mrs Gibson's attempts to make Hollingford more sophisticated.[112] The pretentiousness of the changes wrought by Mrs Gibson inside the house at the time of her marriage are resisted by Molly who, in honouring the memory of her mother and the intrinsic values of the town, prefers the simplicity of her original bedroom to the 'French bed and dressed-up *toilette*-table' (*WD* 189). The subtlety of the italicised use of the 'French' word for dressing table is an echo of an undercurrent through out the novel of a 'French' influence. It manifests itself in the chintz at Cumnor, the new furniture in the Gibson house and the cuisine introduced by Hyacinth, in Cynthia's education and in Aimée's nationality. It is part of the spirit of change which pervades the novel and serves to highlight the image of conservatism and provincialism of Hollingford society and it contrasts with the faded colonial influence which can be found amongst the interior furnishings at Hamley. By inference Gaskell suggests that the colonial influence is established and innately superior. Gaskell is clearly

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112 These sophisticated changes are a complete contrast to those made in the Barton home which were determined by their economic circumstances but neither Mary nor Molly were able to determine what happened to their home environment.

fascinated about the way in which domestic interiors can be the spatial manifestation of social status and social change because it recurs throughout her fiction.[113]

By presenting the picture of the town partly through Hyacinth Gibson's eyes, Gaskell can remain distanced from her picture whilst leaving the reader to decide whether Mrs Gibson's image of Hollingford is more of a commentary on her character or the place. However, to redress the balance, maintain the status quo and complete her picture of Hollingford, Gaskell highlights values of propriety, integrity and honesty through Mr Gibson, Molly and the Browning sisters, who are the socially acceptable 'insiders' of the town.

COUNTRY ESTATES

The portrait of the country estates, an essential element of Gaskell's rural landscapes, is best developed in *Wives and Daughters.* They constitute two of the four socio-spatial realms on which the novel is constructed, whereas in *My Lady Ludlow* Gaskell's narrative lens is focused on a single country estate, that of Hanbury Court. Although in this section, reference will be made to Hanbury Court and her earlier provincial writings discussion will concentrate on analysis of the country estates in her final novel. The technique does not change, symbolic representation woven into perceived realism is overlain by ironic humour, constantly reminding the reader of her underpinning philosophy.

Cumnor Towers and Hamley Hall

By the end of the second instalment of *Wives and Daughters* in the Cornhill Magazine, Gaskell had introduced the reader to the major social spheres which were to constitute the structural foundations of her novel. She integrated the spheres of the town of Hollingford and the estates of Cumnor Towers and Hamley Hall into the unfolding drama as the characters and the narrative move between them. As has already been discussed, little about Hollingford is spatial and mappable but the

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[113] Obvious examples are in her 'industrial fiction' and in *Ruth.* There is scope for further research into this aspect of Gaskell's work.

physical contiguity of Cumnor Towers demonstrates the close correspondence between the morphology of Hollingford and Knutsford.

Assuming that Hollingford is modelled on Gaskell's 'creative recollection' of Knutsford, then it is possible to draw a map to show the linear form of the town and the location of the Cumnor estate to the north, with its lodge gate very close to the built up edge of Hollingford. The fictional estate has the same geographical relationship to Hollingford as Tatton Park has to Knutsford. This legacy of the feudal pattern of the close proximity of the lords of the manor to their town could be found throughout England in the early nineteenth century and remains in the present day landscape.[114] For instance Burghley House stands in the same geographical relationship to Stamford as Tatton Park does to Knutsford.[115] With some minor changes, Girouard's word map of the Lincolnshire town of Stamford could apply equally to Knutsford. He writes:

> And from the southern (northern) edge of the town parkland stretched to the spires and towers of Burghley House (Tatton Hall/Cumnor Towers), an Elizabethan (Georgian) Camelot set into a Georgian paradise by the genius of Capability Brown (Humphry Repton).[116]

Physically close to Hollingford, Cumnor Towers is a separate social sphere linked socio-economically and politically to the town and its population by traditions of patronage which had survived from feudal times. Ironically however, whilst the Cumnor estate is adjacent to Hollingford, the house itself stands 'in aristocratic seclusion' within its extensive parkland at least one and half miles from its lodge gate.[117] Their 'aristocratic seclusion' (*WD* 4) therefore, necessitated the carriage rides from Hollingford, of which Mrs Gibson, in particular, was very fond!

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[114] Girouard mentions the dominance of country seats located on the edge of towns. Girouard, *The English Town* 114. Gaskell emphasises the strong economic links as Hollingfords' traders depend on the Cumnor family visits for their livelihoods.

[115] Chapple's view is that Knutsford is different in that it is surrounded by at least 'seven estates bordering' the town. However, of these Tatton Park was the most prestigious and the Egertons were the family who produced the local M.P. Chapple, *The Early Years* 115. See also Bennett, 13.

[116] Girouard, *Town and Country* 35.

[117] This distance along the 'Beech Avenue' was measured on the *Twenty five inches to one mile* plan of Tatton Park, 1878.

Seven miles from Hollingford, Hamley Hall, 'it was no grand aristocratic deer-park this', (*WD* 62) is located only three hundred yards from the road. The ironic tone of the narrator's commentary emphasise the social distinctions which Gaskell is at pains to make between these two families as she uses the houses and their grounds to embody the contrasting positions of these families in the local social hierarchy. Mr Holbrook, 'who owned his own estate in quiet pastoral country, four or five miles from Cranford' lived even closer to the road as he had no drive, only 'a little gate and a box-edged path up to the front door' (*C* 31). Such a modest approach to the house symbolises the fact that:

> his property was not large enough to entitle him to rank higher than a yeoman; or rather, with something of the 'pride which apes humility,' he had refused to push himself on, as so many of his class had done, into the ranks of the squires. (*C* 28)

Gaskell cannot resist ironic intervention at Mr Holbrook's expense to demonstrate the pretentiousness which exists about social mobility, a theme which pervades all her provincial writing.

Hamley is a much smaller estate than Cumnor: Squire Hamley owns only eight hundred acres compared with Lord Cumnor who as 'a great landowner [...] and 'lord of the manor' of Hollingford not only owns the land on which the town is built but possesses an even larger estate at Ashcombe, which is seventeen miles from Hollingford.[118] To manage this land Lord Cumnor requires an 'agent', whereas the squire appears to manage his land almost single handed. He has only the aid of his tenant gamekeeper, Silas, and sufficient gardeners to maintain the flower beds and walled and productive kitchen garden. Like many estates, and despite the Squire's financial problems, Hamley was self-sufficient as the land provided an 'almost

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[118] The reader is not told how many acres Lord Cumnor possesses, an indication perhaps of the vast extent of his estate. Based on the radial distance of 15 miles which is Mr Gibson's medical round, Ashcombe falls outside Hollingford. Ashcombe, is therefore, perhaps another 'sphere' that could have been studied and incorporated in far more detail into this study. However, there is not room for everything, therefore in-depth study has been omitted and reference to Ashcombe is made as it impinges on the spheres of Hollingford under discussion. As the starting point of Cynthia's life and Mrs Gibson's earlier years, perhaps it merits more attention.

luxurious table'(*WD* 268). Lord Cumnor's elderly land agent is succeeded, during the course of the tale, by Mr Preston, whose job is to oversee both the Ashcombe and Hollingford estates; hence his need to move about the countryside. His mobility, residential arrangements and professional duties in land management and his personal ambitions assist in generating narrative drive, as he moves between the two estates and the town.

Architecture

Like Hollingford, little of the outward physical reality of Gaskell's country houses appears in her stories. Rather than indulging in long realistic detailed descriptions of their architectural features, she use one or two deft brush strokes, gradually added, to build up a picture of the Cumnor Towers as the embodiment of the social position of the Cumnor family. In historical terms, Lord and Lady Cumnor are 'nouveau-aristocracy' as they are able to trace their ancestors back only as far as the seventeenth century. Ironically however, the exterior features of Cumnor Towers do not symbolise the unpretentious unadorned architecture that was typical of Queen Anne, but more appropriately its 'towers' and 'perron' typify the re-building which was so popular in Regency times in the Knutsford area.[119] The simple three storey red-brick hall of 1716 at Tatton was replaced in two stages between 1780 and 1813 by a stone mansion in the neo-classical style which was fashionable at the turn of the century. It was therefore a fairly new house when Gaskell knew it. Capesthorne was re-built in 1837 following a disastrous fire and its gothic revival towers date from that time. Tabley Hall, also re-built during the eighteenth century, sports a double curved staircase known as a 'perron'.[120] The combination of 'towers', a 'perron', and description of the house as a 'mansion' is convincing evidence that Cumnor Towers is an imaginative

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[119] Sylvester, *A History of Cheshire* 72. See also pages 6 and 7 in this chapter for the process of architectural change.

[120] These architectural details are sourced from a number of guides to these local houses. Tatton, Capesthorne and Tabley produce guides for visitors that are rich in such details. Postcards, leaflets and pictures also provide helpful insight The other invaluable sources are Peter de Figueiredo and Julian Treuherz. *Cheshire Country Houses.* (Chichester: Phillimore, 1988)166-7. 'Tabley Old Hall' *Country Life* 14 July (1923): 50-58. 'Tabley House, Cheshire—I *Country Life* 21 July (1923): 84-90.

hybrid inspired by a number of houses with which she was familiar. The repetition of adjectives such as 'great', 'grand' and 'aristocratic' used to describe the property and its estate serve to emphasise her intention to provide 'a symbolic representation' rather than a realistic picture of Cumnor Towers. Even less is revealed about the exterior of Hamley Hall. All that the reader learns is that it is a red-brick house which possesses windows which reach the floor the middle one of which is also a door providing access to the garden from the ground-floor library. Red brick was a local building material and the epithet 'old' in relation to the house and its interior (which parallels her use of 'great' in the context of Cumnor- both are used four times) is used to represent the contrast between the ancient ancestry of the Hamleys who had lived at the hall 'ever since the Heptarchy', and the relatively recent, 'nouveau' Cumnors. By omitting detail, Gaskell seeks to imply that the construction of the hall in red brick symbolises the honest unpretentious use of local building materials whereas the more fashionable neo-classical style of Cumnor Towers was achieved by the use of blocks of Runcorn sandstone. The absence of architectural fripperies like 'perrons' and 'towers' at Hamley emphasises the long ancestral heritage and traditional values for which the Squire stands.[121]

It is a difficult and impossibly time-consuming task for the purposes of this study to try to trace the originals in all the individual features and elements which Gaskell pieces together to formulate Cumnor Towers and Hamley Hall. However, by assembling the obvious clues which help to authenticate the originals, it is possible to see that as a creative writer she wanted to produce unique and original creations which were hybridised from her own experience.

As already observed, the Gothic revival towers of the Cumnor mansion are probably inspired by Capesthorne Hall, the 'perron' can be found at Tabley and the 'aristocratic mansion' denotes Tatton. As has been highlighted already, the spatial location of this hybrid is modelled on Tatton Park. Gaskell's good friendship with Caroline Davenport

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[121]The same set of values is depicted in the faded gentility of the interior decor at Hamley.

and frequent visits to her home at Capesthorne, adds credence to the use of its gothic towers in her fictional creation.[122]

On one occasion, Gaskell describes the house as 'shabby' (*Letters* 6) which seems to be the inspiration for Hamley, which has threadbare carpet, and faded curtains- although the gardens are 'beautiful'-the adjective which is repeatedly used in *Wives and Daughters* to describe the grounds at Cumnor Towers.

At Hamley the door in the long window leads directly on to a rose garden which bears more resemblance to Peover Hall, where the rose garden is adjacent to the house, than Tatton or Capesthorne. Joan Leach is strongly of the opinion that there are elements of Peover Hall in her portrayal of Hamley, not least because of the building materials and the unostentatious architecture of the house.[123] Leach also considers that the drainage problems that typified the Peover estate could have been the model for the Squire's problems at Hamley.[124] Peover is a relatively small estate three miles from Knutsford and one with which Gaskell was familiar, for it was in Peover Church that her parents, grandparents and her aunt were married. The church lies within the 'parkland of the adjoining hall', and was probably the inspiration for the church in which Mr Gibson remarries, for Gaskell describes the journey from the 'Manor house to the church in the park'(*WD* 163).

Peover may have been the inspiration for two other fictional creations as well. Built as a manor house by Sir Randle Mainwaring in 1585, his original large-scale plan was never achieved 'curtailed perhaps for financial reasons.'[125] It was not until the

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[122] A number of documentary sources confirm their friendship. In May 1836, 'she rode above 18 miles [...] & lunched at Capesthorne.' *Letters* 6. She visited again in December 1849, *Letters* 91 and in 1852, she went to see Caroline's trousseau and farewell to her servants. 'An unpublished Gaskell letter,' *Gaskell Society Newsletter* Aug. (1990) 4-9.

[123] Anna Unsworth favours Dam Head House, Mobberley as a possible inspiration. The home of several generations of the Holland family, Gaskell knew it well. It is a red-brick farmhouse. In the light of Gaskell's technique of selectivity and amalgamation, no individual house can be ruled out of her process of 'creative recollection' although this house is not grand enough and only three miles from Knustford to be replicated as Hamley Hall. Anna Unsworth, *Elizabeth Gaskell: An Independent Woman* (London: Minerva, 1996) 181.

[124] Joan Leach, letter to the author, 26 July 1997.

[125] Figueiredo and Treuherz 138.

eighteenth century that it was considerably extended. However, it retained its original exterior Elizabethan architectural features. Constructed of red-brick, it had mullion windows with stone facings, many gables, and Virginia creeper smothered its walls. These features are evident from photographs that pre-date the 1960's when the extensive Georgian section was demolished.[126] Gaskell's account of the evolution of Hanbury Court, which she located in the Warwickshire of her youth, appears to be a condensed version of the history of Peover Hall. 'Hanbury Court is a vast red-brick house. The house had been modernised in the days of Queen Anne, I think; but the money had fallen short that was requisite to carry out all the improvements.' (*MLL* 35). Unable to recognise Avonbank or Barford, the houses in which Gaskell spent some of her Warwickshire schooldays, in her description of Hanbury Court, Chitham was at something of a loss in piecing together the topographical jigsaw. However, if it is assumed that Gaskell employed her technique of selectivity and amalgamation in the creation of Hanbury Court, then the jigsaw can be completed. It would seem that the house could be an amalgam of Peover with a touch of Clopton in its architecture. The former is immortalised in the terrace and by its priory origins; Peover inspired the history and front exterior, and Clopton provides the building materials, gate-house, situation and several interior features like the dais in the hall, and wood panelling.[127] In addition to the architectural features, there is a another clue that helps to endorse Peover as the inspiration for Hanbury Court. The servant, Randal, who escorts Margaret Dawson from the stagecoach to the house has the same name, although different spelling, as Sir Randle Mainwaring, the knight who built

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[126] Figueiredo and Treuherz 141.

[127] Ditchfield's study of the manor houses of England includes a typical floor plan for the houses of the gentry. The description is closely matched by that of Hanbury Court so clearly Gaskell had a manor house in mind so Clopton and Peover would have been appropriate models for Lady Ludlow's home. Ditchfield 24; 26. It should be remembered that when Gaskell saw Clopton House it had fallen into disrepair. The portrait she paints in the contribution to *Visits to Remarkable Places* reflects its dilapidated state. 'The walls of the court were broken down and the grass grew wild, and the flowers were tangled with nettles'. Inside, 'the wide shelving oak staircase, with its massy balustrade' was 'crumbling and worm-eaten'. Howitt 135; 136.

Peover.[128] Ashcombe, is also a manor house, which is built of stone rather than brick, but it possesses the mullion windows, gables and Virginia creeper typical of Peover.

The more the inspirational possibilities are explored the more obvious it becomes that these houses appear to be amalgams rather than replicas of those houses she knew. However, undoubtedly Gaskell intended that the location of Cumnor to mirror that of Tatton and the patronage of the Cumnor family in relation to Hollingford to echo that of the Egertons in relation to Knutsford.

The Grounds

To a great extent the land use surrounding Cumnor Towers endorses the formality and large dimensions of its interior. The grounds are landscaped rather than natural, and ornamental rather than functional. At Cumnor the route of the 'smooth tree lined avenue' goes through an 'aristocratic deer park' before reaching the house. The remainder of the grounds is landscaped in the tradition of the grander houses of the time: [129]

> But she lost all consciousness of herself by-and-by when the party strolled out into the beautiful grounds, the like of which she had never even imagined. Green velvet lawns, bathed in sunshine, stretched way on every side into the finely wooded park; if there were divisions and ha-has between the soft sunny sweeps of grass and the dark gloom of the forest-trees beyond, Molly did not see them and the melting away of exquisite cultivation into the wilderness had an inexplicable charm to her. (*WD* 11)

Man-made features such as ha-has, fountains, walls and fences, glittering greenhouses and hothouses, a profusion of exotically coloured flowers, and 'exquisite' rather than functional 'cultivation', mirror the opulence of the domestic interior. The ornamental grounds, hothouses and greenhouses may appear to closely resemble those which could be found at Tatton. Nevertheless the 'beautiful' grounds of Capesthorne could

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[128] Figueiredo and Treuherz 138. See also Hugh Montgomery-Massingberd, 'Peover Hall,' *Cheshire Country Life* n.d.

[129] Tatton Park was landscaped by Humphry Repton. Chapple, *The Early Years* 115. Michael Waters *The Garden in Victorian Literature* (London: Scolar Press, 1988) is worth exploring.

equally well have been Gaskell's inspiration.[130] Joseph Paxton was commissioned to build a conservatory for the Davenports, the dimensions and grandeur of which almost equalled that of Chatsworth. Although it does not appear specifically in the novel, a watercolour painted in 1827 by Edward Blore, Capesthorne's architect, epitomises Gaskell's Cumnor Towers. (See Fig 6.2)[131]

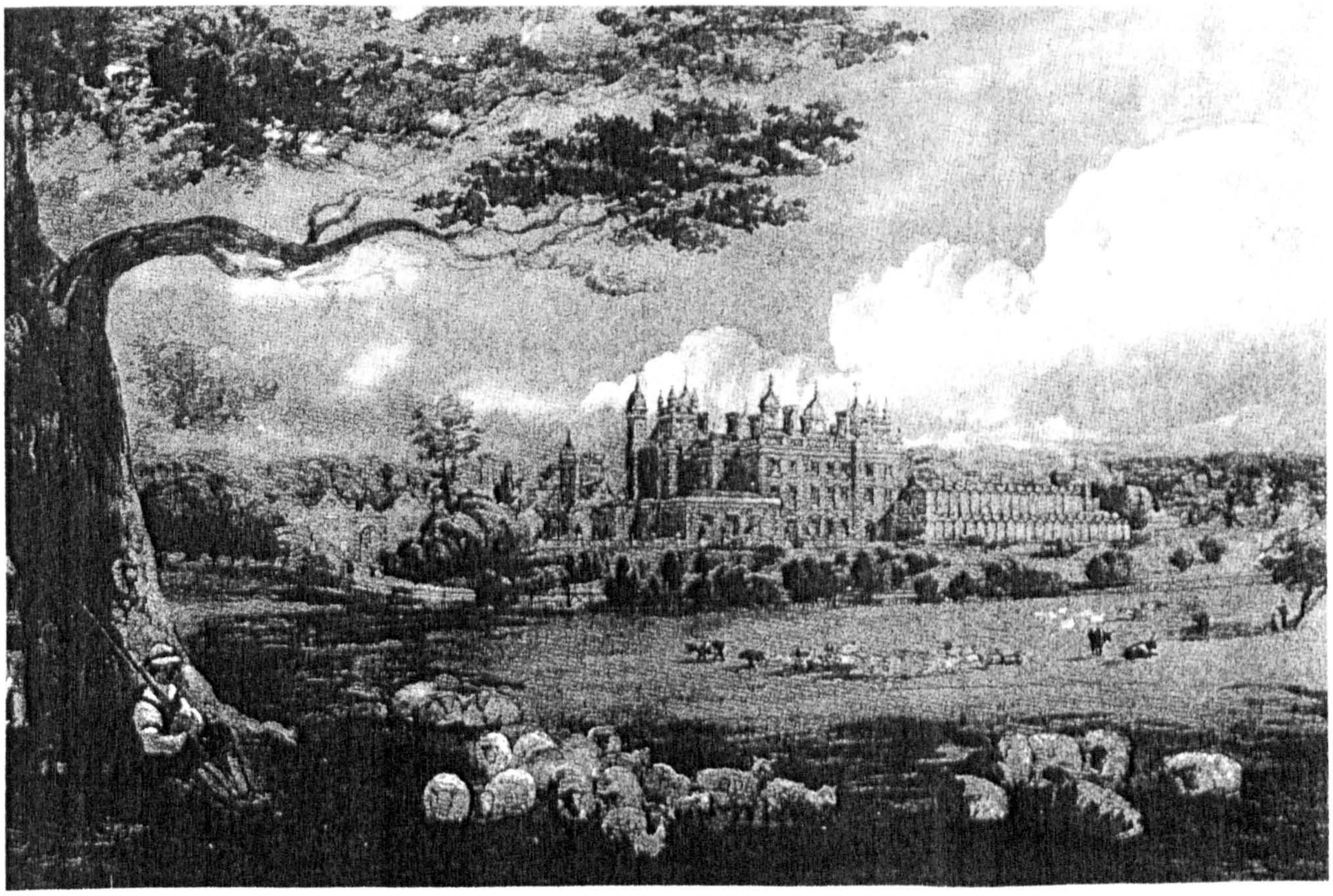

Fig. 6.2 The Garden Front, Capesthorne Hall
Source: Peter de Figueiredo and Julian Treuherz *Cheshire Country Houses* (Chichester: Phillimore, 1998) 50.

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[130] The 'exquisite cultivation' found at Cumnor Towers appears to have similarities with the 'beautiful grounds' of Capesthorne. Beyond the West lawn at Capesthorne is a ha-ha. The fact that for Molly the 'exquisite cultivation melted away into the wilderness' demonstrates these eighteenth century landscaping techniques, because a 'ha-ha' was responsible for the seamless appearance of the landscape. I am grateful to Jane Wilson for her excellent lecture on 'Gaskell and Gardens' Gaskell Society Meeting, Francis Holland School, London, 15 May 1999. Also, Jane Wilson, letter to the author, 25 Sept 1999.

[131] Although Blore was responsible for re-modelling the house during the 1830's, the painting depicts the house as Gaskell would have known it.

More important is the fact that these grounds contrast markedly with the functional, productive, natural environment of Hamley. Here the entrance and drive is bounded by hay meadows and the flower and kitchen gardens and old greenhouses yield their harvests for the meal table, flower vases, nosegays and gifts. The squire even goes over to the Hollingford nursery to buy cuttings for his wife. This is gardening as opposed to estate management. However, at one time Hamley had landscaped grounds and a terraced walk:

> that overlooked the pleasant slope of the meadows beyond; the walk had probably been made to command this sunny, peaceful landscape, [...] and at some previous date, when there might have been a large family of Hamleys residing at the hall, ladies in hoops, and gentlemen in bag-wigs with swords by their sides, might have filled up the breadth of the terrace, as they sauntered, smiling, along. (*WD* 116)

Gaskell's provides this rather romantic picture recalling long-lost gracious living at Hamley as a contrast to the rather more grand modern landscaping which is characteristic of Cumnor Towers. Her intention once again is to highlight and emphasise to the reader that Hamley has the deep roots in this landscape despite its economic and social decline.

The reality of these contrasting country house grounds provides far more than a scenic backdrop to the action. Their perceived reality and symbolic representation are interwoven into the fabric of the text to produce dramatic tension, narrative drive, highlight character and demonstrate Gakell's underpinning deterministic philosophy. Four instances will serve to illustrate this.

The evocation of past grandeur quoted above is compatible with the solitude that Molly deliberately sought in this spot so she could nurse her 'misery' having heard that her father was to re-marry. 'It was now a deserted walk', presumably due to lack of family, money and interest on the part of the squire who does little entertaining, so Molly thought it was a place where she would be undisturbed.

In the artificial heat of the glittering greenhouses, on her first visit to Cumnor Towers, Molly feels claustrophobic. Lady Agnes talks devotedly and at length about the

cultivation of orchids but Molly prefers flowers grown in the open air. The faintness which overcomes her is intensified from prolonged exposure to the sun and triggers a whole series of events which introduce 'Clare' who is to become Molly's step-mother. Prior to this, through Molly's unfamiliar and youthful perceptual filter the reader sees the landscaped vistas of Cumnor Towers. Her first response was a consciousness of the ' inexplicable charm' of the natural landscape beyond the manicured lawns and wooded parkland. Gaskell describes this as 'wilderness' because it was natural as opposed to manipulated by human hand; there is a sense in which it is not contained; and because it evokes an emotional response in Molly. These are the criteria by which Gaskell defines 'wildscapes': therefore the 'wilderness' provides a symbolic link with the future as it not only subtly signifies Molly's suitability as a wife for Roger , the natural historian, but it also heralds her emotional response to him as a future husband.

The fourth instance occurs as Molly walks through the little wood at Hamley that separated the gardens from the adjoining fields: chatting with the squire, she summons up the courage to ask about the much-feared possibility of her father's re-marriage. The moment of dramatic tension is deflected by the squire who exclaims 'Look at that!' and draws her to a pond or 'mere', presumably the one that Molly was able to see if she craned her neck on looking out of her bedroom window. In the middle of the lake is a small vegetated island with a colony of various birds from herons and rooks to coots and grebes. This natural environment is another appropriate place for Molly to learn something of Roger's interest in and knowledge of natural history as the squire tells her about his son's achievements and ambitions.

The mere and island at Hamley is reminiscent of Tabley Mere and the area surrounding the old Hall, much loved by Gaskell, where she used to spend happy days picnicking in her youth. It features conspicuously in *Mr Harrison's Confessions* as a tableau which is very similar to her description of such picnics can be found in a

letter written to the Howitts in 1838 (*Letters* 14-15). [132] Mrs Bullock, second wife of the attorney of Duncombe, 'proposed a picnic to some old hall in the neighbourhood.'

> There was a moat round the house, with a boat on it; and there was a gallery in the hall from which the music sounded delightfully. The family to whom the place belonged were abroad, and lived in the newer and grander mansion when they were at home [...] . (*Mr H* 368)

Whilst this contracted fictional description closely resembles the description given in the letter, its narrative importance is derived from the way the place is woven into the fabric of the novel. From Harrison's perspective, it is an unsatisfactory day because of the demands made upon him by various members of the party. The way the groups organised themselves both outside in the grounds, on the boat, on the mere, and in the hall over supper prevented him from proximity to Sophy. A good deal of movement amongst the party takes place but physical distance is maintained between the two. What should have been a happy pleasant day, in which Mr Harrison was able to become better acquainted with the townspeople, became for the protagonist, 'the most disagreeable of pleasure' he had ever had (*Mr H* 377). It culminated in the death of Sophy's little brother who adored her and who had so enchanted Mr Harrison en route to the picnic. As an amalgamation of her experiences, this evocation of place is a classic example of the process of 'creative recollection' that she included in so much of her 'heartfelt fiction'.[133]

Entrances and Exits

Entrances, like windows and views, play a significant role in *Wives and Daughters.* Entrances are the points of entry to the social spheres which are the focus of Gaskell's concerns and they link interiors to exteriors. Three of the entrances to country houses are of particular interest because as they are woven into the narrative they demonstrate

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[132] Gaskell adored 'solitary manor-houses, surrounded with trees and grey with lichens' (*Letters* 14) and Tabley Old Hall is reminiscent of Clopton Hall which has already been suggested was inspiration for several of her fictional houses.

[133] Chapple, *The Early Years* 432.

vivid realism based on 'creative recollection', demonstrate the underpinning deterministic philosophy, and illustrate symbolic representation.

The library at Hamley seems to bear strong resemblance to that at Tatton as both have five long windows via which there is access to the house. This entrance is used frequently and, for one moment of dramatic tension. Molly enters the house via these windows is quietly reading up the library steps when first Osborne, and then, Roger enters. Coming in from the garden by chance, Roger fails to see Molly, hands a letter to Osborne and during the course of their conversation Molly learns of Osborne's secret marriage. It was a chance event: to be so intimately involved with the family and to keep the secret was a test of Molly's integrity which she passed with flying colours.

On the occasion of the annual open day at Cumnor, Molly has to seek refuge from the heat of the sun in the house. She enters the house through a side entrance as befits her position which leads into 'an anteroom' full of 'light garden tools and bows and arrows of the young ladies of the house'. Like other interior space Gaskell uses throughout her work, this detailed description suggests that she was familiar with a room just like this at one of the grand houses in which she frequently stayed. It may not have been a local one as she was a habituée of country house parties and weekends around the country. The contents of the room are the paraphernalia of the female members of the leisured classes who indulge in a little light gardening and archery to fill the hours of the day.

At Hamley, years later, when distraught due to her father's news of his re-marriage, Molly rushes out of the house; she leaves via a side door which is the route used by the gardeners who are responsible for manuring the garden. There could no stronger contrast between the symbols of the leisured class and that of the practical, self-sustaining work ethic which characterises the functioning working unit of Hamley Hall.

The amount of detail Gaskell includes in her portraits of these country houses must be derived from personal experience via the process of 'creative recollection' to provide

realism. However, the pictures are overlain by strong symbolic representation of the social hierarchy which exists in her fictional provincial town. Mr Gibson, although socially accepted by the aristocracy, uses the 'back-way' to the house; the 'House' on this side, the Towers at the front. The front and back doors at Hope Farm are signified by their names: the front is 'The Rector' and the back which invariably stands open is known as 'The Curate'. At the vast Hanbury Court, the social distinction between the front and back doors is not made for practical reasons. Visitors use the front door only on the first occasion because,

> from time immemorial, the magnificent and fierce Hanbury wolf-hounds [...] had been and still were kept chained in the front quadrangle, where they [...] were always ready with their deep, savage growl at the sight of every person and thing, excepting the man who fed them, my lady's carriage-and-four and my lady herself. (*MLL* 47)

All visitors to the house go to the nail-studded perennially open terrace door which makes the house unusually universally accessible.[134] The long description about the traditions of the entrances at Hanbury Court precede the arrival of 'a little boy', Harry Gregson, a character upon whom hinge Gaskell's themes of social hierarchy and socio-economic change. Hence she builds up the tension by narrative prior to the ensuing drama in which the apparently illiterate boy from a family of poachers carries a message, not on paper-he has lost that- but in his head because he had read and committed the message to memory. Despite Lady Ludlow's distrust of education, for she thought it would upset the social status quo, Harry Gregson's innocent charm plays a part in her change of heart. She establishes a school in the village which he uses as a spring-board to become, later in life, the Reverend Henry Gregson, Vicar of Hanbury. Thus Gaskell weaves the intricacies of her places into the narrative structure and drive of her works.

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[134]Chitham suggests that there is no nail studded door at Avonbank. It is possible there was one at Clopton. Chitham 13. This particular door conveys a particular and rather sinister image perhaps appropriate to the image of the house but at odds with the accessible image that Lady Ludlow herself creates in having the door perpetually open so that everyone could enter and leave without formality.

THE RURAL LANDSCAPE

In addition to her roles as creative writer and social historian, Gaskell is also naturalist, rural economist and meteorologist. In the context of the countryside, she demonstrates appreciation of the dynamics of ecosystems, the use of the natural environment for economic gain, and the issues which surround the issues of conservation of these resources for the benefit of the landowner.

Gaskell's story of wives and daughters unfolds in a well-wooded, enclosed landscape criss-crossed by pretty, flowery, high, hedge-bound lanes. The individual elements play a significant literary role in the narrative, and therefore merit being discussed in turn. Her treatment of the rural landscape is consistent with that of the built and social environments of Hollingford and its country estates. Its partial selective realism is overlain with symbolism and romanticism as Gaskell seeks to dramatise her underlying philosophy of the intimate connection between human beings and their environment. Much of the landscape description is romanticised through Molly's eyes as a 'mental' rather than an objective map. As will be shown, such representations are more than merely spatial, they include sounds and smells converting an otherwise two dimensional medium into something multi-dimensional. In addition to providing an aesthetic picture of the rural landscape, Gaskell also weaves her stories around the functioning rural economies of farm and country estate. The seasonal rhythms of the farming year, guided by the seasonal changes in the weather, help to drive the narrative in *Cousin Phillis;* whilst agricultural improvements introduced on the country estates, and the conservation issue closely associated with these improvements, as well as the advent of the railway, enable Gaskell to pursue her themes of evolutionary economic change and progress in the countryside.

Individual elements of the rural landscape

Trees

Trees dominate Gaskell's rural landscape. They are mentioned twenty-six times in *Wives and Daughters* and are a constant presence in the rural environments of the other provincial writings. The emphasis laid on trees in this novel suggests her

familiarity with, and love of, them, and their importance to her as part of any rural landscape. It is, of course, their absence which helps to define the moorlands as a 'wildscape' and makes their vast expanses feel so unfamiliar after so many childhood years within the well-wooded Cheshire landscape.[135]

This well-wooded, natural landscape provides a sense of intimacy in contrast to the rounded, broad sweeps of green velvet lawns of the ornamental landscaped parklands of her great country houses. The trees which are deciduous, mostly ash, elm and oak, typify the 'climax' vegetation of lowland Britain.[136] They appear in lines where they border lanes and roads and individually, in gardens, on village greens, and in hedgerows, as part of the 'planned landscape' of the enclosure movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, trees, like all other individual elements of a place are more than part of the scenic backdrop. They are inextricably linked to the actions and movements of the characters throughout her works. In all cases the trees, as well as being ornamental, provide the major function of green shade due to the wide spread and branches typical of deciduous trees. On some occasions too, Gaskell uses them in a number of ways but especially as a retreat for a character in a particular situation or emotional state.

Hamley village has 'a bench all round the trunk of the great tree, midway between the church and the inn' (*WD* 61). Within this description lies an implicit contrast in the morphology of Hamley and Hollingford. For whereas Hollingford is linear and straggles along to the lodge gates of the 'great house,' Hamley is nucleated around the

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[135] The unfamiliar treelessness of the Haworth Moors is discussed more fully in Chapter 3.

[136] The concept of climax vegetation is used to identify a vegetation succession which has passed through all its seral stages to achieve its maximum development and has reached equilibrium with its environment. The term 'climax' is assumes the vegetation in equilibrium with both prevailing climate and soil. The climax for well drained lowlands of Britain is mixed deciduous woodland, whereas the higher altitudes would be characterised by coniferous woodland. However, human intervention as an arresting factor means that the uplands of Britain are now treeless ecosystems clad with heather moorland. Rackham explains that between seven and nine thousand years ago after the Pleistocene (Great Ice Age) Britain would have had a wooded landscape but that over 50% of it has disappeared over those thousands of years to be replaced by what is effectively a 'planned landscape' as human activity has replaced the medieval open field system of farming with an enclosed landscape. Oliver Rackham, *The History of the British Countryside* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1997) 33.

green with its shady tree and community functions of inn and church.[137] Trees provide shade. The elm, a classic hedgerow tree of an enclosed landscape,[138] serves this useful function for both the farm dogs and Mr Gibson on a very hot morning as he pauses on his journey to see Molly at Hamley Hall. The detail of the tree species and its function adds to the authenticity and realism of the text.

With their deeply spreading branches to provide deep shade, cedar trees are an ideal spot under which to shelter from the sun. Molly seeks such shade at Cumnor Towers where she falls asleep and is found by 'Clare', her step-mother to-be. At Hamley Hall, she and Mrs Hamley create an 'open air summer parlour' beneath a large cedar. The deodar (cedar) and morello cherry trees in the garden of the 'large and comfortable house' in Knutsford where Gaskell lived with her Aunt Lumb may have been her inspiration.[139]

Individual trees become a motif for the emotional life of Molly as well as playing a functional role in the drama. As a child, Molly sought solitude in the branches of the cherry tree in her father's garden. As a young girl Ellinor Wilkins had a similar place of refuge and imaginative play which she shared with few others. 'There was a piece of ground surrounding the flower-garden,[...] a grassy bit, out of which a group of old forest-trees sprang. Their roots were heaved above ground [...] . The roots of these old trees were Ellinor's favourite play-place.' (*ADNW* 21). The site plays a dramatically significant role in the novel because it was here that Ellinor established an enduring friendship with Dixon which was to survive the ensuing tragedy surrounding the murder of Dunster. Later in the story, but prior to the death of this man, Ellinor had

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[137]Joan Leach considers that Peover is the inspiration for Hamley and mentions the entrance to the Hall which is 'close to the whipping stocks'. She also states that this is 'the name of the inn adjoining one lodge of Peover Hall, (used to be called the Mainwaring Arms and the court leet was held there). Joan Leach, letter to the author, 26 July 1997.

However there does not appear to be a nucleated village at the site in the manner of Gaskell's description. Evidence for this is derived from a visit made to the site in 1997. Neither can evidence of a village be identified on a map contemporary with the time that the novel is set, i.e. the late 1820's. This would seem to be another instance of Gaskell's technique of amalgamation and 'creative recollection'.

[138] Rackham 93. He states that the commonest hedgerow trees were oak, ash and elm.

[139]Joan Leach, letter to the author, 26 July 1997. Chapple, *The Early Years* 125.

set tea outside amongst the gnarled exposed tree roots where she 'used to play as a child'. Mr Wilkins was prevailed upon to join the tea but 'was silent, almost sad' during the meal and then 'shivering in that strange unaccountable manner which is popularly explained by the expression that someone is passing over [...] your grave', said: 'Ellinor! this is not a day for out-of-door tea. I never felt so chilly a spot in my life. I cannot keep from shaking where I sit. I must leave this place, my dear, in spite of all your good tea.' (*ADNW* 46). Gaskell intended that this moment should be a prophetic prelude to the ensuing events of murder. Ironically it was under this very tree that Dunster's body was buried so it became the secret place about which only Mr Wilkins, the murderer, Ellinor and Dixon were aware. After her father's death, Ellinor was forced to move from Ford Bank but, out of the loyalty established within the spot, Dixon stayed to keep watch over the burial ground. Ironically his very presence at Ford Bank was to incriminate him, and so Gaskell establishes one aspect of the deterministic role of one particular place in *A Dark Night's Work.*

So often in Gaskell's writing these concealed, secret places of solitude are associated with deep emotion. At Hamley, when Molly was so miserable and upset on learning the news of her father's impending re-marriage, she rushed to a weeping ash which afforded what she thought would be a refuge. Concealed by its naturally pendant branches, a chance encounter with Roger Hamley provided Gaskell with the opportunity to initiate the first intimacy between her two protagonists.

Tree-lined Lanes

Lines of trees whose branches overarch lanes and roads are a familiar and recurring aspect of Gaskell's fictional rural landscape. Such lanes are highly reminiscent of the area around Sandlebridge, the farm owned by her grandparents. Sandlebridge was 'close to an old forge on a lane edged by oaks and elms'.[140] Chapple translates Burdett's 1777 map of Cheshire into words and the similarity of this description to the approach to Hope Farm and others, found so frequently in her work, suggests

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[140] Chapple *The Early Years* 54; 199.

that this deeply loved spot inspired her fiction. 'I went along the lane, [...] switching at the taller roadside weeds, till, after a turn or two, I found myself close in front of the Hope Farm. There was a garden between the house and the shady grassy lane' (*CP* 265).

Integral to the planned landscape of enclosure were these tree-lined lanes which constitute such a significant element of Gaskell's rural landscape:

> In the great majority of parishes it was a complete transformation, from the immemorial landscape of open fields [...] into the chequer board pattern of small, squarish fields enclosed by hedgerows of hawthorn, with new roads running more or less straight and wide across the parish in all directions.[141]

Mentioned twelve times in *Wives and Daughters* and five times in *Cousin Phillis,* their proliferation meant that channels of movements were numerous in Gaskell's landscape so that her characters can move between the socio-spatial realms of country estate, town, village and home. Such movement engenders narrative drive and maintains the narrative dynamic.

There are instances in which these lanes are used as the prelude to dramatically significant moments. Molly follows such a lane, having been left by her father to make her own way home two miles from Hollingford. Having emerged from the enclosed, shady intimacy of the lane onto the unenclosed area of Croston Heath, she encounters Preston and Cynthia half-hidden by coppiced trees.[142] Molly's walk drives the narrative forward to the moment of dramatic tension when the clandestine but long-standing engagement between Cynthia and Preston is revealed and Molly becomes embroiled in its secrecy. However, she agrees to help extricate Cynthia from the engagement to Preston by meeting him in the avenue on Cynthia's behalf in the avenue which leads to Cumnor Towers. This road is tree-lined like the shady lane which led on to the heath but, this time, rather than offering shade and intimacy, the

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[141] W.G.Hoskins. *The Making of the English Landscape.* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988) 145.

[142] It is likely that the trees growing on the heath are coppiced which may account for the reason that there is little woodland. If not maintained in this way, the heathland would disappear as trees would succeed the woody shrubs and flowering plants.

wind in the trees creates a sense of foreboding in keeping with the dubious nature of Molly's mission.

Gaskell uses the same environment and same technique in *Mr Harrison's Confessions.* The reader accompanies the picnic party along 'a sandy lane, with high hedge-banks; the wych-elms almost met overhead' (*Mr H* 371) as a prelude to the nuances of social interaction so subtly displayed on that occasion. The reader is engaged in the action as he/she goes hand-in-hand with the character prior to the impending revelation or event.

Hedgerows

Hedges, like trees, were more than a mere aesthetic, ornamental adornment to Gaskell's rural landscapes. Mentioned eight times during the course of *Wives and Daughters,* by weaving such natural elements so intricately into her stories, Gaskell demonstrates her knowledge and understanding of the rural economy and the natural environment. Deep country lanes which are characteristic of Gaskell's landscape are bounded by high hedgerows 'not at all in the style of modern agriculture' (*WD* 380). 'Shocking farming!' (*Mr H* 371), Mr Bullock called out as he rode along the lane described above on his way to the picnic. He is expressing the view of the nineteenth-century agricultural economist whose considered that tall, wide, overgrown hedgerows occupy potentially productive farmland which can provide economic gain. Hedges are micro-ecosystems with complex food webs of plants, birds and insects. If they are trimmed more land is made available and weeds are suppressed, but the ecosystem may be damaged and insects which are valuable in reducing the incidence of pests amongst growing crops are lost. Maintenance of hedgerows by 'hedging and ditching' was common practice and part of the rural economy in the nineteenth century is demonstrated in *A Dark Night's Work.* Whilst out riding, Ellinor and her father exchange words with these workers. (*ADNW* 43). As a first person narrator in response to Mr Bullock's criticism of 'shocking farming,' Mr Harrison says: 'So it might be, but it was very pleasant and picturesque-looking.' (*Mr H* 371) His comment would seem to reflect Gaskell's personal opinion about the issue. Aware, from her

rural upbringing, of the methods which characterised farming,Gaskell admits to a preference for the flower and fruit filled hedgerow which she depicts most often in her work. They appear as places of concealment and solitude in which to lick wounds and contemplate events. Molly resorts to such a spot after Cynthia's contorted emotional entanglements have been revealed and she commands Molly to disappear from her sight:

> 'Go away. I cannot bear the feeling of your being there–waiting and listening. Go downstairs–out of the house–anywhere–away. It is the most you can do for me, now.'
> Molly had her out-of-door things on, and she crept away [...]; she lifted her heavy weight of heart and body along till she came to a field, not so very far off,–where she had sought the comfort of loneliness ever since she was a child; and there, under the hedge-bank, she sate down, burying her face in her hands, and quivering all over as she thought of Cynthia's misery, that she might not try to touch or assuage. (*WD* 574-575)

Gaskell uses this precise spot in order to focus the reader's attention on Molly's selflessness. She is not distressed on her own behalf but her emotional energy is being used up as she contemplates Cynthia's misery. Molly's generosity of spirit here echoes her selfless act in meeting Preston on Cynthia's behalf in Park Avenue.

At a moment of crisis after Bellingham's departure, Ruth conceals herself by a hedge bank to avoid encountering the village folk. 'She opened a gate into a pasture field, and crept up to the hedge-bank [...] . She sat down on the sloping turf by the roots of an old hawthorn-tree which grew in the hedge [...] until all should have passed by.' (*Ruth* 94-95). At times of high emotional drama such as the two quoted, Gaskell invariably links her characters to their precise environment, illustrating the link that she believed existed between human beings and their environment.

Gaskell develops the point further, because in addition to the passive use of the hedgerow environment as a place of retreat, Molly also interacts with this aspect of the landscape on two occasions. These moments are both symbolically and dramatically significant. On her way to Hamley Hall for the first time, the flowery hedgerows which border the lanes enchant and consequently distract Molly from what for her is the ordeal of meeting new acquaintances with whom she is to stay, and who

are to play an important role in her life. She nearly asks the coach-driver to stop so that she can pick roses and honeysuckle:

> It was very pleasant driving quickly along in the luxurious carriage, through the pretty green lanes, with dog-roses and honeysuckles so plentiful and rathe in the hedges, that she once or twice was tempted to ask the coachman to stop till she had gathered a nosegay. (*WD* 61)

Later in the story, although she dislikes blackberries, Molly clambers up steep hedgerow banks to collect these autumn fruits for Cynthia only to find on her return home that Roger has reached 'an understanding' with her step-sister before leaving for Africa. The carefully and lovingly gathered natural hedgerow fruits which have been neglected have become soft and flabby and are dying like Molly's unspoken hopes as she tries to come to terms with her emotional response to the news. These instances are two small examples of the way in which Gaskell interweaves the natural environment to symbolise the emotional life of her characters and the narrative.

Although Gaskell's landscapes are at times pretty and ornamental, they are also functional and productive. Judging by the produce yielded from her garden this was a much respected aspect of the environment. For Roger and Mr Gibson its natural ecosystems provide a source of botanical and faunal specimens for both long term ambition and for expediency. In Roger's case, accompanied by his dredging net, his expeditions around the countryside, accessible on foot from Hamley, enable him to collect 'treasures of nastiness' (*WD* 117) out of genuine interest, and for his long term academic career as a natural historian. Conversely, Mr Gibson needs to create a reason to return to Cumnor Towers to confirm Molly's invitation to the open day. So in addition to visiting a sick housemaid, he ensures access to the family by taking a 'rare' specimen of *Drosera* for Lady Agnes' botanical collection.[143]

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[143] Throughout Gaskell's rural novels there is a thread of biological science. There is a close although not immediately obvious connection between the 'common sundew' Drosera rotundifolia and Holman's reading of Liebig. Liebig was the agricultural chemist who in 1840 recognised 'explicitly for the first time that an organism is constrained by the essential mineral nutrient available to it'. His thesis became known as 'The Law of the Minimum'. Drosera could survive in nutrient deficient conditions by its

Unenclosed commons[144]

Although most of Cheshire had been enclosed by the early nineteenth century, there were some ' mosses' and areas of unenclosed, 'common' land dotted about the Cheshire plain. Lindow Common, Alderley Edge and Knutsford Heath were two notable examples in the East Cheshire area with which Gaskell was familiar. She clearly loved the sense of open space that such areas afforded because they appear often in her provincial writings where she makes dramatic use of them. Such 'open breezy commons' appear in *Cousin Phillis, Wives and Daughters* and *My Lady Ludlow.* The way in which the unenclosed land on the margins of Hope Farm is depicted as 'out yonder' has a strong sense of personal observation about it (*CP* 307). The topography and vegetation of the area 'beyond' Hope Farm consists of

> a broad upland common, full of red sand-banks and sweeps and hollows; bordered by dark firs, [...] all ablaze with gorse [...] which [...] appeared brilliantly golden' (*CP* 307-308).

The reader familiar with *Ruth* may be reminded strongly of the unenclosed space on the 'Hill of the Hundred'. It has been argued that Alderley Edge inspired this location. If Sandlebridge, as seems likely, inspired Hope Farm, the question of geographical accuracy arises. Is there a mappable geography in *Cousin Phillis*? Anne Thackeray Ritchie confirms that it was possible to see Alderley Edge from Sandlebridge Farm.[145] However, Gaskell must have telescoped the distance between the Farm and the unenclosed upland, for it is unlikely that Paul, Holdsworth and Phillis walked as far as Alderley Edge, three miles away, to use Holdsworth's

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insectivorous nature which meant that it was adapted to obtaining its nutrient supply from sources alternative to the soil which was waterlogged. See footnote 20.

[144] Duthie remarks that the 'breezy upland common bordered with firs and golden with flowering gorse is an often recurring feature of her landscapes. They open up a fresh stage in the action. Duthie could have gone further and suggested that they are places closely associated with moments of high dramatic tension and emotion. Enid Duthie, *The Themes of Elizabeth Gaskell* (New Jersey:Rowman and Littlefield, 1980) 28.

[145] Anne Thackeray Ritchie, introduction, ix.

surveying equipment. After all, the common is depicted as 'out beyond' the farm, prepositions which do not convey a sense of great distances.

These areas of unenclosed land appear to be the lowland equivalent of the upland moorland wildscapes in that they correlate well with extremes on the emotional spectrum. Just as Ruth and Philip seek the unfamiliar upland treeless moorland wastes to express misery and distress, so Gaskell uses unenclosed lowland commons to depict moments of suppressed passion between her characters. Ironically however, it was 'the shelter of overhanging sand-banks' in one of the hollows on the unenclosed land which gave Phillis an opportunity for physical contact with Holdsworth, demonstrating the undercurrent of passion in this scene:

> There we were, cowered down, close together, Phillis innermost, almost too tightly packed to free her arms enough to divest herself of the coat which she in her turn tried to put lightly over Holdsworth's shoulders. In doing so she touched his shirt.
> Oh! how wet you are! she cried.'.(*CP* 308).

Similar undercurrents of passion are evident and implicit within the scene on Croston Heath, an area of unenclosed land characterised by coppiced woodland, two miles from Hollingford.[146] Here, unexpectedly, Molly encounters Cynthia and Preston, whose exchanges reduce Cynthia to tears which develop into hysteria and complete loss of control. Although not privy to the conversation between the lovers, Gaskell makes it clear from the dialogue in Molly's presence that both ends of the emotional spectrum-love and hate-are involved in the relationship at this point. She uses land which is physically unenclosed as an appropriate location to depict the range of human emotion in a novel which is noted generally for emotions restrained by the conventions and mores of small town provincialism. Not only do these scenes provide evidence of human intimacy but also because the environment represents the emotional spectrum, the scenes demonstrate the intimacy between human beings and their environment.

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[146] The locational inspiration is likely to have been Knutsford Heath.

Rural Economy

Her upbringing with farming grandparents in a countryside of wealthy landowners provided Gaskell with an awareness of, and familiarity with, the rural economy. She understood how to run a farm, appreciated the issues involved, and realised the determinants of a successful operation. This knowledge and experience was the well-spring of her inspiration for *Cousin Phillis* and *Wives and Daughters* in particular. Although the scale of the agricultural economies varies between these two works the issues are similar.

Beneath the literary and biblical allusions which litter *Cousin Phillis,* the references to Wordsworth, Dante and Virgil, the evening hymn singing in the fields which 'deepen this rural Pastoral tale,'[147] lies the reality of an agricultural farm economy, the daily and seasonal rhythms of which help to drive the narrative. Unlike Lord Cumnor and Squire Hamley who oversee their land but do not work it (although Squire Hamley is far more closely involved with his land than Lord Cumnor), Cousin Holman is a working farmer whose punishing daily routine illustrates his commitment to the farm. He completes thirteen tasks before breakfast at half past six (*CP* 270-271). Farmer Holman's 'early' morning routine not only demonstrates his commitment and dedicated labour but also provides an insight into the nature of the farm's mixed agricultural system.

His priorities are determined by the necessity of ensuring that he is the steward of a financially viable economic unit. To this end he tries to ensure that the hay-making is completed before the rain descends, and that the wheat crop is dispatched to the miller before the roads becomes impassable with snow. However, economic gain is less of a priority than the welfare of his workers. This attitude smacks of Thornton's concern for those who work for him and is similar to Squire Hamley's interest in Silas. The mentally defective Timothy Cooper is re-instated although he is a thorn in the farmer's side. Holman gives instructions for the repair of thatch to the cottage of the

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147 Uglow 540.

elderly worker, who lies undisturbed in bed whilst his employer carries out the task of tending to the horses first thing in the morning. Unlike the Squire, however, who is hide-bound by tradition and prejudice, Holman is receptive to technological innovation and deems land improvement essential and imperative. Nevertheless, as a part-time Dissenting minister, his religion forms an important part of the working day and takes priority over social encounters so Paul has to wait to be introduced whilst Cousin Holman issues instructions and the evening hymn is sung:

> Well, my lass, this is cousin Manning, I suppose. Wait a minute, young man, and I'll put on my coat, and give you a decorous and formal welcome. But–Ned Hall, there ought to be a water-furrow across this land: it's a nasty, stiff, clayey, dauby bit of ground, and thou and I must fall to come next Monday–I beg your pardon, cousin Manning–and there's old Jem's cottage wants a bit of thatch; you can do that job tomorrow while I am busy'. Then, suddenly changing the tone of his deep bass voice to an odd suggestion of chapels and preachers, he added, 'Now I will give out the psalm 'Come all harmonious tongues', to be sung to 'Mount Ephraim' tune.' (*CP* 271)[148]

However, the economic realities of the farm are subsumed beneath the poetic pastoral of what Uglow describes as the 'English Georgics'.[149] As harvest follows harvest, Gaskell paints a vivid picture of haymaking, apple gathering and kitchen garden production in which the central figure is Phillis. Although a self-educated man of his time in contact with, and interested in, the world beyond the farm, Farmer Holman preserves his daughter in the 'contemplative retreat' of Hope Farm.[150] However, the advent of the railway, the technological advance which dominated and typified the age, was beyond Holman's control. Social contact with the railway engineers changed her life irrevocably. As the railway encroaches upon the peace of Hope Farm, so the

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[148] Richard Watson has traced the hymnal traditions of the time. He drew particular attention to the hymn sung in this scene in a lecture entitled, 'Elizabeth Gaskell and the English Hymn,' A.G.M. , Gaskell Society, The George Inn, Knutsford, 25 Sept.1999. This hymn indicates that the hard work and human endeavour carried out on the farm is part of the 'higher' work of those who live in the service of God. In the scene quoted, there is also an interesting correlation between Dissenters and receptiveness to socio-economic change.

[149] Uglow 541.

[150] Uglow 541.

narrative is driven forward, an argument which will be developed more fully at the end of this chapter.

In her final, pre-railway novel, *Wives and Daughters,* the agent of socio-economic change focuses upon the agricultural economies of the country estates. Land improvement and reclamation was not a new process but financial support from the government in the form of grants and loans in the early nineteenth century enabled landowners like Squire Hamley to undertake such schemes. Technological developments assisted, like the invention of the tile-drain, but this breakthrough did not occur until the 1830's, so Gaskell's chronology may not be totally accurate.[151] A poorly drained area of heavy clay crossed the boundary between the Cumnor and Hamley estate. To Lord Cumnor it was 'an piece of outlying waste and unreclaimed land close to Squire Hamley's property' on which it was known as Upton Common. Both landowners had adopted reclamation projects which if successful could 'double the value of the estate' (*WD* 198-9).

Within this economic context, Gaskell highlights the contrast between the Squire's intransigent ways and those of the more adaptable, but forward looking aristocrat. Initially resistant to change, the Squire, with the encouragement of his more innovative wife, and the aid of a government grant, hired the men and bought the tile drains-terracotta pipes- to drain the excess water from areas of heavy impermeable clay soils which produced poorly drained land. Squire Hamley's project fell into disuse due to lack of money which was being swallowed up by debts incurred by Osborne, so the tile drains lay abandoned and grew a beard of moss, whilst on Lord Cumnor's immediately adjacent land the men were actively engaged in improvement. The situation is dramatised in a scene in which there are heated and acrimonious exchanges between the Squire and Preston, Lord Cumnor's land agent, about an environmental issue which arises from the improvement work. Lord Cumnor's

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151 Tile drains for reclamation were not introduced until the 1830's. Sylvester 75. Certainly Henry Holland in his study of the agriculture of Cheshire of 1808 does not mention such technology. He focuses on far less sophisticated techniques of deep trenches filled with sods, wood, or stones and bricks. Holland 212-213.

workmen were grubbing up the Squire's gorse coverts for firewood. The squire learnt of this action from his dying gamekeeper Silas to whom he was paying what was to be a last visit:

> 'Them navvies–I call 'em navvies because some on 'em is strangers, though some on 'em is th' men as was turned off your own works, squire, when there came orders to stop 'em last fall–they're a-pulling up gorse and brush to light their fire for warming up their messes [...] . and there'll be nothing of a cover left, if you don't see after 'em.' (*WD* 351)

The consequence for the squire would be the loss of hunting on his land:

> Enclosure of heaths and commons reduced the extent of natural gorse patches where a fox could hide. Good arable farmers grubbed them up. To get more foxes and to get them distributed more evenly,[...] gorse covers and spinneys were started by hunting landlords in well chosen spots [...] . Most of these covers were made in the late 18c or early 19c.[152]

Hoskins' well documented account of the evolution of the English landscape draws attention to the importance of such gorse coverts to country landowners like Squire Hamley. Gaskell was clearly aware of the issue, for Knutsford was located in the heart of hunting country, and most of her fictional provincial towns are located in such country.[153] She successfully interweaves the environmental issue into that of the improvements in the rural economy in order to highlight the response of her characters to change and progress. In this instance, land improvement is seen to be detrimental to the environment. However, the issue is so inextricably linked with the Squire's consciousness of his social standing as well as to his attitude to economic change that whatever view the author might hold about the issue is masked by the

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[152] Hoskins 158.

[153] *My Lady Ludlow* opens as Margaret travels to Hanbury Court and from an area of unenclosed ground which she recognises as a 'chase' she views the countryside. William the Conqueror decreed that vast tracts of land should be designated royal forests on which hunting rights should be preserved for himself and his favourites. Remnants of this policy occur in the English landscape and a 'chase', although now unenclosed grass and scrubland with some trees, was royal forest. Malvern Chase in Worcestershire is a good example of a royal chase on which hunting still takes place. Duncombe and Fordham are renowned for their hunting too. In Knutsford, the Egertons paid the hunt on the Peover estate. Local histories are full of photographs of local meets. K. Goodchild, P.Ikin and J.Leach, *Looking Back at Knutsford* (Timperley: Willow 1984) 38.

passionate exchanges between the two men and the Squire's long exposition of events which resulted in his abandonment of his land improvement project:

> 'I know I turned them off–what could I do? I'd no more money for their weekly wages; its a loss to me, as you know. He doesn't know, no one knows, but I think your mother would, how it cut me to turn them off just before winter set in. I lay awake many a night thinking of it, and I gave them what I had- I did, indeed. I hadn't got money to pay 'em, but I had three barren cows fattened , and gave every scrap of meat to the men [...] . But I'll go on with the works, by–, I will, if only to spite him. I'll show him who I am. My position, indeed! A Hamley of Hamley takes a higher position than his master. I'll go on with the works, see if I don't! I'm paying between one and two hundred a year interest on Government money.[...] I'll not put up with insults.' (*WD* 357)

Although incandescent with rage against Preston, whom he considers an upstart, he is able to explain his sincere regret that his workmen were made redundant. Inextricable links between the environment and human destiny are evident here. If the Squire is receptive to change and adopts land improvement, not only will he ensure the future of his estate, but he will provide work for others. Osborne's fecklessness with money is a factor in the equation for which the Squire had not accounted. Here, Gaskell's theme of 'fate as a cunning hussy' is being interwoven into the equation of human destiny.

The scene is significant for another reason. It is one of the insights into the life of a neglected sector of Gaskell's rural society, that of the worker.

Although the author tells the reader that Silas is the Squire's gamekeeper, his social position is denoted by his speech. Only the servant class in *Wives and Daughters* uses dialect speech and he is the only character to make such a long speech in local dialect in this novel. His house in contrast to all the others is tiny: the index of size is given by the fact that he 'lay in a sort of closet opening out of the family sitting room which possessed only a small window'. However, in the same way that windows of the country houses look out onto their estates so Silas looks out of his window onto 'the moor' as land for which he is responsible and with which he constantly interacts to conserve and maintain the fox coverts for hunting in his role as gamekeeper.

Whilst Silas is an example of the rural law abider, so Harry Gregson, who features in *My Lady Ludlow,* hails from a family of outlaws. His father is a suspected poacher and a squatter on the local Hareman's Common.[154] Lady Ludlow goes to visit the 'cluster of rude mud houses' occupied by a community of rural poor. She had to 'pick her way among the yellow pools of stagnant water that had gathered in the clayey soil' to reach the 'cottages built, as they occasionally were at that day of wattles and clay and thatched with sods' (*MLL* 27).[155] Unlike Kingsley, who wrote in depth about the conditions amongst the rural poor, this is Gaskell's most developed picture of this sector of society.[156] The rural poor appear fleetingly in *North and South* as change has removed a 'squatter's roughly-built and decaying cottage'(*NS* 388) which had disappeared from the landscape when Margaret returned to Helstone. These glimpses contrast with the picture of the urban poor in Manchester not only in terms of the amount of detail but also in terms of narrative perspective. Like many upper and middle-class women of the time[157], Lady Ludlow did not normally cross the threshold of the homes of the rural poor, whereas the reader is given an insight into their domestic interiors in *Mary Barton.*

Like the 'cash-nexus' which lies at the heart of the industrial economy of Gaskell's real and fictional northern towns, so rural economics is an integral part of the fiction written at the latter end of her career. In addition to being intensely realistic, the rural economy is thematically and philosophically integral, as one of Gaskell's chief concerns is the effect of progress and concomitant change upon the rural environment and how human beings respond differently to such environmental change. The contrast between Holman and Squire Hamley exemplify the point beautifully, as has

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[154] Chitham speculates that this name is inspired by a local Midlands name. Chitham 13.

[155] The Winkworth sisters went visiting on 'wild' Lindow Common , an area of poorly drained, unreclaimed land around which there were clusters of houses almost two miles from both Alderley Edge and Sandlebridge. Winkworth, *Letters and Memorials of Catherine Winkworth* vol. 1 437. It is possible that Gaskell accompanied them or that she went with her Aunt Lumb when she lived in Knutsford.

[156] Charles Kingsley *Yeast* (London: Macmillan, 1881)

[157] This is a well-rehearsed argument in relation to the urban poor. See Chapter 2.

been discussed. Through such contrasting human responses Gaskell highlights the close connection between character and, in this case, rural environment.

Romantic Rural Landscapes and Views

Not all the characters in Gaskell's rural/provincial writings interact so closely with the rural environment as those actively working in it. For instance, Cynthia engages little with the landscape. Apart from the clandestine meeting on Croston Heath, she never goes further afield in the Hollingford locality than the Gibson garden. Similarly Mrs Kirkpatrick seems oblivious of the physical landscape. Unlike Molly she has no desire to stop the carriage en route to Cumnor Towers to collect flowers and although she looks out of her window at Cumnor, she is not aware of the view. If, as has been suggested, Cumnor is based upon Tatton, she would have been able to see the, admittedly distant, foothills of the Pennines from the house, as the five long windows of the library afforded excellent views of Bosley Cloud, a distinctive sandstone escarpment seven miles from Knutsford. Gaskell would have known it for it is a dominant unmistakable local landmark.[158] However, Mrs Kirkpatrick 'was looking out of the window, not seeing the trees in the park nor the glimpses of the hills beyond, but thinking how pleasant it would be to have a husband once more'(*WD* 107). The self-centredness, which is her self-imposed barrier to awareness of the view, is in direct contrast to the selfless Molly, whose emotional life is entangled in the local landscape. Throughout the novel, as Molly moves from place to place, she views the landscape from her bedroom windows. However, the views are realistic descriptions of what can be seen within the frame of the window. From her bedroom window, Molly has a view over the town and surrounding countryside. Despite the progression of the years and emotional upheavals in Molly's life, all that changes in the two views presented to the reader are season and time of day. These differences

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158 'The five long windows face south and on a clear day you can see as far as Bosley Cloud, a hill some thirteen miles away.' *Tatton Park: The Mansion* 2nd. ed. (Crewe: Cheshire County Council, 1992) 13.

cause the slight variations of texture, sight and sound within the scene. Molly is twelve when the novel opens with the following view:

> Six o' clock now! the pleasant, brisk morning ringing of the church bells told that; calling everyone to their daily work, as they had done for hundreds of years. Up jumped Molly, and ran with her bare little feet across the room and lifted off the handkerchief and saw once again the bonnet; the pledge of the gay bright day to come. Then to the window, and after some tugging she opened the casement, and let in the sweet morning air. The dew was already off the flowers in the garden below, but still rising from the long hay-grass in the meadows directly beyond. At one side lay the little town of Hollingford, into a street of which Mr Gibson's front door opened; and the delicate columns, and little puffs of smoke were already beginning to rise from many a cottage chimney where some housewife was already up, and preparing breakfast for the bread-winner of the family. (*WD* 1-2).

The same scene appears again two-thirds of the way through the novel.[159] However, Molly is by this time seventeen years old, and the feelings of happy excited anticipation with which she first approached the window are replaced by feelings of disorientation almost amounting to annihilation. She had just received the news that that Roger has made a commitment to Cynthia before leaving Hollingford. In order to draw breath, Molly:

> went to the open casement window, and leant out, gasping for breath. Gradually the consciousness of the soft peaceful landscape stole into her mind, and stilled the buzzing confusion. There, bathed in the almost level rays of the autumn sunlight, lay the landscape she had known and loved from childhood; as quiet, as full of low humming life as it had been at this hour for many generations. The autumn flowers blazed out in the garden below, the lazy cows were in the meadow beyond, chewing their cud in the green aftermath; the evening fires had just been made up in the cottages beyond, in preparation for the husband's homecoming and were sending up soft curls of blue smoke in the still air; the children, let loose from school, were shouting merrily in the distance. (*WD* 391)

There is a sense of continuity in the unchanging daily rhythms of life in Hollingford, symbolised by the smoke from the chimneys at the beginning and end of every day. Molly is able to derive comfort and security as she looks out at the eternal and

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[159] The description of Cranford is very similar to this second one of Hollingford. (*C* 155).

peaceful scene, beloved from childhood, it has a calming effect on her shattered emotions. The familiar, tranquil landscape is the still centre of her ever-turning emotional world. This view of Hollingford is seen through the perceptual filter of familiarity and affection. Here character and narrator are one and the same.[160]

Two such parallel scenes occur at Hamley Hall. Molly's first impressions of the view from her bedroom window there are echoed later as she sits copying Osborne's poetry one hot summer afternoon. The landscape elements which constitute the view parallel the picture of the Cumnor grounds made on Molly on her first visit to that country house:

> First of all, she went to the window to see what was to be seen. A flower-garden right below; a meadow of ripe grass just beyond, changing colour in long sweeps, as the soft wind blew over it; great old forest-trees a little on one side and, beyond them again, to be seen only by standing very close to the side of the window-sill, or by putting her head out, if the window was open, the silver shimmer of a mere, about a quarter of a mile off. On the opposite side to the trees and the mere, the look-out was bounded by the old walls and high peaked roofs of the extensive farm-buildings. The deliciousness of the early summer silence was broken only by the song of birds and the nearer hum of bees. Listening to these sounds, which enhanced the exquisite sense of stillness, and puzzling out objects obscured by distance or by shadow, Molly forgot herself. (*WD* 62-63)

The reader is presented with a picture of the environment into which Roger Hamley was born and brought up. By the end of the description Molly, like Ruth, becomes metaphorically inseparable from the landscape. This scene is a precursor to a second similar view which precedes a climactic moment in the novel. The peace of the summer afternoon and the silence of the house, marked only by the nearer sounds of nature and distant sounds of voices were suddenly punctuated by the arrival of Roger:

> This quiet summer afternoon she took this copying [...] sitting at the pleasant open window, and losing herself in dreamy out-looks into the gardens and woods, quivering in the noon-tide heat. The house was so still, in its silence it might have been 'the moated grange;' the booming buzz of the blue flies, in the great staircase window, seemed the loudest noise in-doors. And there was scarcely a sound out-of-doors but the humming of the bees, in the flower beds

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[160] George Eliot's novels often evoke that same attachment to landscapes much loved through familiarity. George Eliot, *Middlemarch* ed. Rosemary Ashton (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994) 104.

> below the window. Distant voices from the far away fields in which they were making hay--the scent of which came in sudden wafts distinct from that of the nearer roses and honeysuckles--these merry piping voices just made Molly feel the depth of the present silence [...] . Suddenly there was a snap of a shutting gate; wheels cranching on the dry gravel, horses' feet on the drive; a loud cheerful voice in the house coming up through the open windows, the hall, the passages, the staircase. (*WD* 84)

The impact of the onomatopoeic noise associated with Roger's arrival, which was in such marked contrast to the foregoing silence, conveys Gaskell's intention to draw the reader's attention to the significance of this moment for Molly. Roger returns to a landscape with which Molly feels great affinity. It is Gaskell's method of subtly alerting the reader to a potential relationship between the two characters. It is noteworthy too, that Osborne's return was not dramatised; in fact Molly is surprised to learn of his arrival. The contrast of their individual homecomings is also instructive of Gaskell's intentions to develop a relationship between Roger and Molly rather than between Molly and Osborne during the course of the narrative. Thus the romantic realism of the Hollingford and Hamley landscapes are so inextricably linked with the lives of the characters that it is difficult to doubt the philosophy that underpins her fiction.

Meteorological Accuracy

In the notes which accompany his edition of *Emma,* Blythe states that 'weather is never ignored or forgotten, and in all the great scenes of *Emma,* there is a glory in the way that it forms an atmospheric parable behind the action.'[161] However the weather in Gaskell's novels is not 'behind the action' but interwoven into the fabric of her 'provincial' novels in particular. (It can be argued that the characters and action in her urban novels are removed from the immediate effects of the weather by the built environment.)

Brought up in the early nineteenth-century countryside, Gaskell would have been aware of atmospheric conditions and the deterministic role of the weather on human

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[161] Ronald Blythe, notes, *Emma* by Jane Austen (Harmondsworth: Penguin,1966) 470. See footnote 55 319.

activity. Without modern technology, the appearance of the landscape, seed-time, harvest and travel would have been constantly affected by changes in the weather. In addition, Gaskell's moods and health were greatly influenced by the weather as much as by place as she demonstrates by frequent comments to this effect in her letters. [162] Integral to her portrait of both Hollingford and Hope Farm is the weather and the changing seasons. Traditionally, commentators have suggested that seasonal change denotes the passage of time[163] and have failed to highlight 'the near-scientific exactness of her meteorology'[164] which dominates both her 'rural' novels. It determines actions and events, helps to drive the narrative by creating variety in the pace of the tale, and its romantic symbolism reflects mood and creates atmosphere. Although anticyclones dominate the weather in *Wives and Daughters,* prior to Roger's departure for Africa, they account for only 50% of the weather in the novel. Weather is referred to 24 times, of which twelve are references to anticyclonic conditions. Of the 50%, half of those are summer anticyclones, one third winter anticyclones, and the remainder occur in the autumn. Some of the major dramatic events and turning points in the narrative occur during anticyclonic conditions, and the associated weather plays a part in determining the outcome of the event. The spells of the inclement weather typical of depressions occur after Roger has left

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[162] Writing from Warwick Gaskell comments upon the difference in the weather between Manchester and other places that she visits:

> My dear husband determined that I should set off again on my travels and spend these two months, (usually so damp in Manchester) in a warmer drier place [...] . The weather here is so different from Manchester, owing I suppose to the soil being limestone instead of clay, that we have sunshine here, and leaves on the trees while last week at Manchester the trees were bare and there was thick fog till ten or eleven, beginning again at four.' (*Letters* 134-135)

It is possible that Gaskell found the short days detrimental to her health and suffered from a form of S.A.D. (Seasonal Affective Disorder. Of course this was not recognised at that time). She suggests this herself in a letter to Norton in 1865: 'I shall be glad when *light* comes back. I am always influenced so much by darkness, or cloudy skies' (*Letters* 745).

[163] W.A. Craik. *The English Provincial Novel* (London: Methuen 1975) 200.

[164] Blythe 470. Bonaparte mentions especially Gaskell's symbolic representation of the weather throughout her argument but fails to recognise her accurate observation of the synoptic conditions. Felicia Bonaparte, *The Gypsy-Bachelor of Manchester: The Life of Mrs Gaskell's Demon* (Charlottesville and London: Virginia UP, 1992) 122-123.

Hollingford. His departure is a major turning point for Molly in particular, whose melancholy moods are closely correlated with the wet, windy weather. Consequently, the romantic interpretation of the landscape can be seen to apply equally to the weather which often reflects mood in addition to providing the tone and atmosphere of a particular scene. Also the powers of observation Gaskell displays in these descriptions are consistent with the level of detail which characterise her landscapes and fit beautifully into her portrayal of the natural environment.

Hope Farm and the Hollingford countryside bask in high summer temperatures and abundant sunshine which results from the clear skies typical of such seasonal anticyclones. It is during such hot spells that the shade afforded by the wide spreading deciduous trees is so desirable. Reference has already been made to the fact that Molly and Mrs Hamley are able to make 'an open-air summer parlour under the cedar tree where there were chairs, a table books and tangled work' (*WD* 77). Several days later, when Mr Gibson returned to Hamley to inform Molly of his plans to remarry, the weather which had remained fine, had become even hotter, a characteristic of such systems which can last for weeks if they are 'blocking anticyclones'.[165] The oppressive weather, that caused Molly to retreat inside, also caused Mr Gibson to seek the shade of the elm tree as he paused to reflect on his journey over to Hamley to break the news to Molly.

Gaskell's awareness of the development and deterministic role of these weather systems is made obvious in *Cousin Phillis.* Throughout Farmer Holman responds to the weather with concern about his crops and his livestock. He is anxious to complete the harvest before the weather breaks at the end of a fine spell of anticyclonic weather, so all available help is marshalled. 'Betty and the men were in the field helping with the last load of hay, for the minister said there would be rain before the morning'(*CP* 268).

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[165] Blocking anticyclones have the effect of blocking the westerly tracking air masses which prevail in the British Isles and divert them both north and south. These tropical continental air masses bring hot air across the continent from North Africa to influence the climate of the British Isles for a prolonged period, especially in the summer.

So often such systems culminate in high humidities typified by the heat, which 'Paul found oppressive', and conclude with the finale of a thunderstorm. The build-up of heat causes convection cells of hot air to form and rise, cool, and then condense to form huge vertical, electrically charged cumulo-nimbus clouds which produce intense short lived showers of rain accompanied by thunder and lightning. Such a storm occurred in *Cousin Phillis* very soon after the last pile of hay had been thrown on to the cart, providing an opportunity for a intimate encounter between Holdsworth and Phillis as they sheltered from the thunderstorm:

> Then came the blinding lightning and the rumble and quick-following rattling peal of thunder right over our heads. [...] the rain delayed not; it came pouring down [...] Phillis had nothing on but her indoor things – no bonnet, no shawl. [...] Holdsworth took off his coat and wrapped it round her neck and shoulders, and, [...] hurried us all into such a poor shelter as one of the overhanging sand-banks could give. There we were, cowered down, close together, Phillis innermost, almost too tightly packed to free her arms enough to divest herself of the coat, which she, in her turn, tried to put lightly over Holdsworth's shoulders. In doing so, she touched his shirt.
> 'Oh, how wet you are!' she cried [...] 'and you've hardly got over your fever! Oh, Mr Holdsworth, I am so sorry!' He turned his head a little, smiling at her.
> (*CP* 308)

The weather can be seen to determine the actions of the characters and provides the narrator with the opportunity to organise the space to create the effects she desires. The physical interaction of atmospheric processes is echoed on the ground in these human interchanges in *Cousin Phillis,* a technique which Gaskell repeats when the following summer Paul has to break the news of Holdsworth's marriage to Phillis. There is the usual warm calm peace in the house and farmyard as the thunder-clouds gather. Having told Phillis the unwelcome news, the storm breaks, and the narrative pace increases as the men rush in for shelter. 'In the succeeding bustle', Paul 'came across Phillis, always busy, [...] always doing the right thing'. He believed 'that the worst was over'. In the 'serene' days characterised by 'soft falling rain' that followed, when Cousin Holman 'allowed himself a few more hours of relaxation' (*CP* 333), Paul noticed that 'ever since that day of the thunderstorm, there had been a new, sharp,

discordant sound to me in her voice, [...] her restless eyes had no quietness in them; her colour came and went without a cause that I could find out' (*CP* 334).

This reference reveals that whilst the weather determined how the days were spent, it did not reflect mood nor the fact that the thunderstorm marked a turning point in Phillis' destiny.

Although Gaskell does not use such dramatic incidents in *Wives and Daughters,* high weather pressure systems play a major role in terms of their overt realism and underlying symbolism. Gaskell's knowledge of winter anticyclones and her ability to distinguish between the subtleties of different types of frost is evident in her final novel and is typical of a country girl who would be aware of such atmospheric nuances.[166]

On Hope Farm, the onset of snow determined farm activity:

> A great deal of snow had come down [...] the minister was anxiously housing his cattle, and preparing all things for a long continuance of the same kind of weather. The men were chopping wood, sending wheat to the mill to be ground before the road should become impassable for a cart and horse. My cousin and Phillis had gone up-stairs to the apple-room to cover up the fruit from the frost. (*CP* 321)

Polar continental air associated with winter anticyclones in Britain brings snow which, due to the sub-zero temperatures, lasts for prolonged periods. Clearly Cousin Holman is aware of this and can organise his activities according to the weather. Like their summer equivalents, winter anticyclones are characterised by clear skies and light winds and may also serve the function of blocking alternative weather systems and remain in place for long periods of time, as is the case in *Wives and Daughters.* Mrs Hamley's deteriorating health during the winter months is symbolised by the increasing intensity of frost. In the initial stages, the sun is warm enough to melt the hoar frost, which appears to embellish the vegetation with 'glittering drops of water.' By the time that her death is imminent, the intense cold

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[166] Like the coastal topography of the littoral zones at Abermouth and Monkshaven, the atmospheric conditions are used for Gaskell's narrative purposes.

produces rime which is added to the hoar frost to coat the 'thicket' with a cloak of opaque ice echoing the white window blinds:[167]

> Now, the trees were leafless,–there was no sweet odour in the keen frosty air; and looking up at the house, there were the white sheets of blinds, shutting out the pale winter sky from the invalid's room. Then she thought of the day her father had brought her the news of his second marriage: the thicket was tangled with dead weeds and rime and hoar-frost; and the beautiful fine articulation of branches and boughs and delicate twigs were all intertwined in leafless indistinctness against the sky. (*WD* 216)

The combination of the colourlessness and leaflessness conveys the lifelessness felt by Molly as she walks in the garden prior to leaving Hamley, for her role as Mrs Hamley's companion is almost at an end. The weather, as well as a harbinger of Mrs Hamley's imminent death, also heralds a moment of dramatic tension in the plot, as Molly learns by chance soon after returning to the house that Osborne Hamley is secretly married. A moment of tranquillity identified by both landscape and weather is once again the prelude to a dramatic moment and an increase in narrative pace within the plot.

Therefore it can be seen that Gaskell uses winter anticyclones to correlate closely with death and melancholy and summer anticyclones to symbolise life, productivity and happiness. Molly's sojourn at Hamley is characterised by the symbolic as well as realistic polarity of summer and winter anticyclones, between the life-giving sun which enables herself and Mrs Hamley to create an open-air parlour, and the white frosty lifelessness of the bitterly cold weather prior to Mrs Hamley's death. Significant pauses in the narrative prior to major turning points occur in anticyclonic weather as the characters' thoughts and feelings are expressed through the landscape under a particular weather system. Reference has already been made to one of these pauses as Molly copies Osborne's poetry in the 'quivering heat' (*WD* 84) of a summer

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[167] **Rime** is the result of intensely cold conditions in which the temperature is below freezing but supercooled droplets of water can exist. When these drops of water touch objects the temperature of which are below 0°C, freezing occurs and an opaque white deposit of ice forms. The opaque nature of the ice is the result of little presence of air. Rime is an index of intensely and prolonged cold conditions. Any air movement will create feathers of ice in a downwind direction of the object.

afternoon immediately prior to Roger Hamley's arrival. Mr Gibson is at the heart of two similar narrative pauses. First, as he journeys to Hamley to break the news to Molly of his impending marriage, he stops under the elm in the summer heatwave, apparently to watch the harvest, but really to delay conveying what he knows will be unwelcome news to Molly:

> It was a brilliantly hot summer's morning; men in their shirt-sleeves were in the fields getting in the early harvest of oats; as Mr Gibson rode slowly along, he could see them over the tall hedge-rows, and even hear the soothing measured sound of the fall of the long swathes, as they were mown. The labourers seemed too hot to talk; the dog, guarding their coats and cans, lay panting loudly on the other side of the elm under which Mr Gibson stopped for an instant to survey the scene [...] . (*WD* 112)

The narrative pauses in this way a second time. It is autumn and Mr Gibson is riding to Hamley in the knowledge that Osborne is terminally ill and Roger is leaving on an expedition to Africa which will take him away for a prolonged period. Mr Gibson is in a quandary, because he is uncertain as to how much the Squire should be aware of Osborne's state of health:

> So he rode on, meditating; his reins slack, his head a little bent. It was one of those still and lovely autumn days when the red and yellow leaves are hanging-pegs to dewy, brilliant gossamer-webs, when the hedges are full of trailing brambles, loaded with ripe blackberries, when the air is full of the farewell whistles and pipes of bird, clear and short – not the long full-throated warbles of spring [...] . The country surgeon felt the beauty of the seasons perhaps more than most men. He saw more of it by day, by night, in storm in sunshine or in the still, soft, cloudy weather. He never spoke about what he felt on the subject [...] . But if his mood ever approached the sentimental, it was on such days as this. (*WD* 382)

Although reluctant to admit the deterministic role of the weather on his feelings, at this point in the narrative Gaskell uses the scene to demonstrate the underlying humanity and sentient being that lurked beneath the apparently brusque, severe and business-like exterior of the doctor. The narrative pauses to denote the weight of responsibility that lies upon Gibson's shoulders as a respected doctor and his sense of that responsibility. The deterministic link between character, place and weather highlights the underpinning philosophy of Gaskell's work.

After Roger's departure from Hollingford there is a marked shift in the systems which influence the weather, both metaphorically and realistically. His departure for Africa occurs about two thirds of the way through the story: 50% of Gaskell's references to the weather occur after his departure, and of these 75% of them are about the inclement weather associated with depressions which help to create mood and metaphorical atmosphere. Rain and 'blustery' winds are the main features confining the characters to their homes, and reflecting their melancholy moods and highly charged emotions. There are vivid moments in which both the Squire and Molly are subject to feelings of gloom when it is pouring with rain. Gaskell brilliantly evokes the sense of a wet Sunday afternoon which determines the Squire's absence from church, thus making an afternoon seem interminable because of the unrelenting rain:

> Today it had rained so unceasingly that he had remitted the afternoon church; but oh, even with the luxury of a nap, how long it seemed before he saw the Hall servants trudging homewards along the field-path, a covey of umbrellas!(*WD* 452)

The Squire's boredom leads him to pick a fight with his eldest son about Osborne's intentions about marriage and his future, which resulted in anger and a rift between the two men.

The sense of Molly's melancholy and abandonment at being left in Hollingford when the family has travelled to London for Cynthia's wedding is intensified by and reflected in the unseasonable August rain. However Molly sees through the weather to the 'wide pleasant' view of the landscape from which she derives consolation from the glimpse of the familiar church spire in Hollingford, although, for the most part, the sunny and peaceful landscape of the first two-thirds of the novel had been replaced by this 'rain-blurred' landscape (*WD* 648).

It is hardly surprising that Gaskell used the weather in this way, as she herself was sensitive to the atmospheric conditions and often commented about the detrimental effect of the air in Manchester on her mood and health. Mrs Gibson makes such an observation in the novel. Ironically, she chastises Molly for being so influenced when Molly remarks, having looked out at the 'rain-blurred' landscape:

> 'Yes!. We are very forlorn tonight; but I think its partly owing to the weather.' 'Nonsense, dear. I can't have you giving in to the silly fancy of being affected by weather.'(*WD* 515)

Although Mrs Gibson gives no credence to the influence of the weather on mood, this comment follows immediately upon an observation which indicates that the weather can determine activity, for Mrs Gibson suggests that she and Molly might have taken 'a little impromptu tour' had the weather been less 'miserable' (*WD* 515). Such inconsistency typifies Hyacinth Gibson, and highlights the fact that Gaskell took a contrary view to that of this silly pretentious fictional creation. It was a way for Gaskell to distance herself from her character, in contrast to her identification with characters whose empathy with the weather and the landscape matched her own. Close correlation between physical well-being and the weather, akin to that experienced by the author herself, is illustrated in the case of Mrs Holman, whose recurrent headaches are determined by thundery weather. On one occasion prior to an imminent thunderstorm, she has retired to bed to nurse a particularly severe headache, leaving Phillis alone downstairs. On his arrival at the farm, Paul takes the opportunity to reveal the news of Holdsworth's marriage in Canada, which causes Phillis' decline into the depths of depression.

The weather also determines actions and events which have long-term consequences for the characters. For instance, the events at the annual open day at Cumnor are to some extent determined by the very hot weather which causes Molly's headache, the need to lie down inside the cool interior of the house, and the subsequent events as the result of being forgotten by the woman who was to become her step-mother. The weather can determine a change of plan. For instance, rather being escorted home on foot by Roger, Cynthia and Molly travelled by fly from the Miss Brownings.

Roger who was handing round the refreshments 'was tempting' Cynthia:

> At length [...] Cynthia took a macaroon, and Roger seemed as happy as though she had crowned him with flowers. The whole affair was as trifling and commonplace as could be in itself; hardly worth noticing; and yet Molly did notice it, and felt uneasy; she could not tell why. As it turned out, it was a

> rainy night, and Mrs Gibson sent a fly for the two girls instead of old Betty's substitute. (*WD* 252)

So Gaskell used the weather as a physical determinant of human activity to enable her to leave the reader with the contrast between Roger's deep conversation with Cynthia and his rather cursory treatment of Molly on this occasion.[168] Throughout the story she builds up the dramatic tension in the relationship between Molly and Roger so that the reader continues to hope for a happy fulfilled outcome between these two. On this occasion, the reader is left with a feeling of a missed opportunity and sense of anticlimax because of the weather.

Gaskell's weather is dominated by still conditions, for lack of wind is the result of a gentle pressure gradient, a characteristic feature of anticyclones. Increasing wind speed indicates an increase in the emotional temperature of the narrative and is used sparingly for generally emotions are subdued throughout this novel. Osborne's odd moodiness is reflected in the changeability of the spring weather, and the blustery conditions which accompany Molly's meeting with Preston symbolise the highly charged emotional atmosphere of their exchanges.

Through the meteorological accuracy of the weather which pervades her two final pieces of fiction, Gaskell is able to create 'mood', tone and metaphorical 'atmosphere', as well as demonstrating both the deterministic philosophy which underpins her work and the link between narrative drive and rural environment. The atmospheric conditions are woven into the fabric of the countryside, which in turn is part of the narrative fabric of all her provincial writings.

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[168] Throughout Jane Austen's novels the weather determines the plot, events and characters' movements. Mr Woodhouse, in particular is highly sensitive to the weather and does not travel if there is the slightest hint of inclement conditions. His preoccupation with the subject makes him the butt of Austen's ironic humour. In the early nineteenth century human activity was at the mercy of the vagaries of the weather for there was little technology which could override its deterministic influence. To a great extent, this continues to be true today despite modern technology.

THE METROPOLITAN LANDSCAPE – London and its role in the provincial narratives.

London is a real, metropolitan and continual presence in the otherwise fictional provincial worlds, although the narratives rarely visit the city. Only in *A Dark Night's Work* is the reader invited to follow a character through its streets, although the narrative leaves Hollingford momentarily for the Summer exhibition at the Royal Academy. This is because it was Gaskell's intention to create another, alternative, social world which was linked to, but spatially separate from, her provincial worlds. This world therefore is necessarily viewed from a distance through the perceptual filter of provincialism. The links are largely social and professional rather than economic and occur through the movement and relationships of the characters. These established links and the image of London is best developed in *Wives and Daughters,* as the picture is built up gradually and indirectly through the perceptions articulated by the story's characters rather than by narrative intrusion. However, reference will be made to other novels during the course of the discussion.

London possesses a mappable reality akin to Manchester. Whereas she is not inclined to create a coherent, detailed, or complete, geography for her provincial towns, the metropolis is a real place with an already established geography, which enables Gaskell to utilise her familiarity with the city to produce a map tailored to the needs of the story.

The three addresses provided in *Wives and Daughters* means that it is possible to produce a map of the London depicted in the novel. When located on an early nineteenth century map of the city, (See Fig.6.3) it becomes clear that they are intended as an index of social status, so once again Gaskell is playing the role of social geographer and historian as well as creative writer.[169] Two of the addresses belong to Mrs Gibson's brother, Mr Kirkpatrick,who has made a career as a successful

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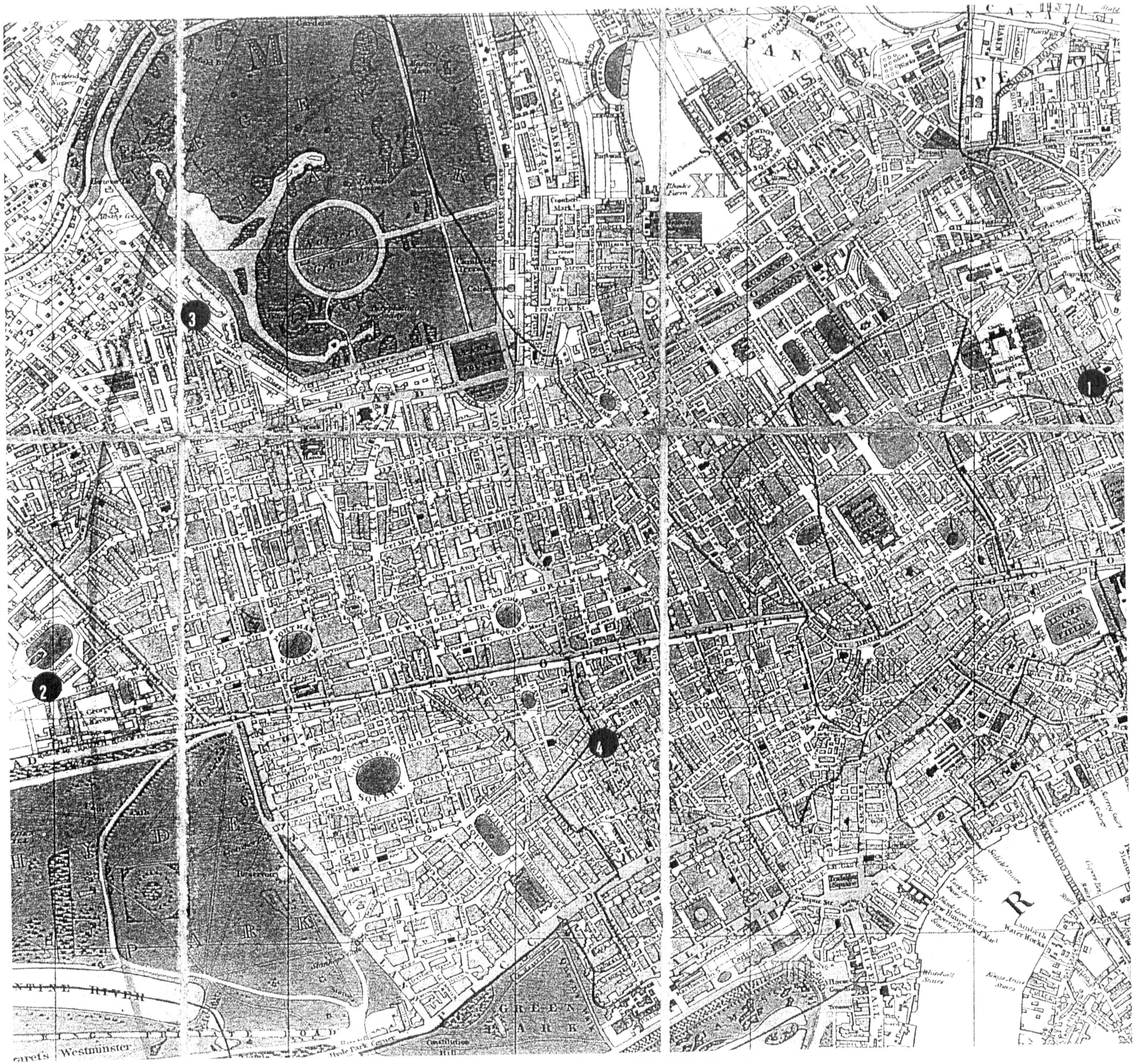
[169] Harley Street is the extent of the London depicted in *North and South* but the address carries social connotations of the professional middle classes. As has been discussed, the single address does not make a map of London in *North and South.* See Chapter 1 48.



HOMES OF *MR KIRKPATRICK*

1. DOUGHTY STREET, Bloomsbury – his home when he was 'struggling on in his profession encumbered with a large family' (*WD* 439).

2. HYDE PARK STREET, Hyde Park – a new house on the fashionable side of town. An appropriate address for a newly appointed QC. *Ralph Corbet* (*ADNW*), also a QC, lived at 21 Hyde Park Gardens.

3. SUSSEX PLACE, Regent's Park - *Cynthia's* home on her marriage to *Mr Henderson*, a successful lawyer. There was room for a brougham and stables.

4. REGENT STREET – watershed between the fashionable West End and the less affluent eastern part of London.

Fig. 6.3 The London of *Wives and Daughters*
Source: Cross' New Plan Of London, 1835 (Holborn Hill: J Cross, 1835)

barrister. Gaskell is at pains to demonstrate that his success is indicated not only by his elevation to Queen's Counsel but also spatially by his move from Doughty Street, where Cynthia had stayed 'nine or ten years' earlier when he was 'struggling on in his profession encumbered with a large family' (*WD* 439), to Hyde Park Street on the northern side of Hyde Park. At the time of the novel, i.e. in the late 1820's, the house in Hyde Park Street would have been brand new. Cross' map of 1835 (Fig.6.3) indicates that its location was right on the western edge of the city and its West End location was in the fashionable part of 'Town' and an appropriate location for a newly appointed Q.C.[170] Ralph Corbet, on his elevation to the judiciary, moved into a home at 21, Hyde Park Gardens which was part of the same estate. It was this house that Ellinor visited in her efforts to clear Dixon's name of the murder of Dunster. Mr Kirkpatrick's previous address of Doughty Street, Bloomsbury,[171] lay to the east of Regent Street, which was the divide between the less affluent areas to the east and the desirable fashionable west end where the wealthy lived.[172] So Mr Kirkpatrick's changing address symbolises his upward social mobility as he achieved professional success. On her marriage Cynthia moves from Hollingford to London to the

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[170] Cross' 1835 map, Fig. 6.3 shows that not all of Hyde Park Street was completed so like the 'half-finished streets' on the edge of Manchester at the beginning of *Mary Barton*, Hyde Park Street and its environs must have resembled a building site in the 1820's. Gaskell had stayed at 8 Hyde Park Gardens in 1853 as she uses it as a letter head in correspondence to Monkton Milnes. *Letters* 231. Gaskell's knowledge of the geography of London gradually increased due to her fairly frequent visits. It is possible that the use of the Doughty Street address was inspired by her friendship with Dickens.

[171] Horwood's map demonstrates that the Bedford area was laid out between 1790 and 1813. Stephen Inwood *A History of London*, (London: Macmillan, 1998) 260-1. Bloomsbury was solidly middle class, the sort of address that Mr Kirkpatrick would have expected to have initially. Roy Porter describes the fact that the, '3rd earl was slow to build, missed the fashion which migrated west, so Bloomsbury remained choice but did not gain aristocratic eclat'. It became a desirable quarters for lawyers and other professionals'. Roy Porter. *London: A Social History.* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996) 112. Booth's map of social class indicates red colouring for Doughty Street,. This colour represented 'well-to-do', one step lower in hierarchy than the 'wealthy'. Therefore the address was professional rather than aristocratic.

[172] Moretti 73. The divide can be clearly seen from Booth's maps. The squares and terraces of Bayswater in which Hyde Park Street and Hyde Park Gardens are located are coloured gold, Booth's representation of the 'wealthy'. East of Regent Street the colouring is predominantly pink (fairly comfortable) purple; a mixture of pink and red (poverty and comfort mixed). Charles Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London.* (London: Macmillan, Third Series, 1902). 'As the fashionable area of London moved west, so Soho and Covent Garden' deteriorated into brothels, lodging houses and taverns and bagnios' and became a 'sin bin.' Felix Barker and Peter Jackson, *London:2000 years of a City and its People.* (London: Cassell, 1975), 204

prestigious address of Sussex Place, a terrace of Regency houses on the western margins of Regent's Park. Easson comments about Gaskell's familiarity with this area, for her close friend Tottie Fox lived at number three.[173] However, he does not expand upon the nature of these houses. Completed in 1822, Sussex Place was the grandest of Nash's terraces laid out as part of his planned development of Regent's Park.[174] The house which overlooked the green, open space of the parkland opposite would have been very new when Henderson acquired it prior to his marriage to Cynthia. Not only had Gaskell visited the Foxes frequently but she also stayed in the house in 1850, and therefore was drawing on her personal experience and perception of the house as an index of social status in using this address as Cynthia's first married home.[175] Booth's map of London of 1889, on which he superimposes the socio-economic texture of the inhabitants, demonstrates that, owing to their affluence, both Cynthia and her uncle are living in the 'wealthy' area of London, which Booth denoted by gold shading on his map.[176] The density of housing was low in this area and their affluence meant that Cynthia and her husband, to the envy of her mother, would have had space to keep a brougham and stables for the horses. By using specific addresses, Gaskell created her own map of London with its social overtones; a map which has more in common with that of Jane Austen than Charles Dickens. Apart from Mrs Gardiner, most of Jane Austen's characters reside to the west of Regent Street,whereas the heart of Dickens' London lies far to the east of Regent Street in the socially deprived poverty stricken areas such as Cheapside.

However, Dickens' portrait of London may lie at the root of one of the perceptions of London which can be found in *Wives and Daughters.* The provincial perspective is

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[173] Easson, notes, *Wives and Daughters* 726.

[174] A map of 1826 shows Sussex place as one of the first terraces on the western side of the Park. Barker and Jackson 91. Summerson considers these grand houses something of 'Nash's major outrages on the taste of his time.' John Summerson, *Georgian London* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962) 183.

[175] *Letters* 140 has the letter-head address as 3 Sussex Place although there is no impressions of the house and location given in the letter itself.

[176] Moretti, opposite p. 77 he includes a facsimile of a section of Booth's social class map. Although Booth produced empirical maps rather than a theoretical model he recognised the relationship between social class and residential pattern similar to that manifest within Manchester's townscape.

articulated by Miss Browning, whose image is derived from her reading, for she has never been to the city. As 'the scene of pickpockets and robbers', it is strongly reminiscent of *Oliver Twist* and demonstrates that she perceives the city in moral terms as a place whose 'moral pitch few could touch and not be defiled'. Certainly London's moral overtones as 'Babylon' and a 'den of iniquity' were a popularly held view, which seems to be endorsed by Gaskell.[177] Mrs Goodenough, a better travelled but, perhaps, not more enlightened, Hollingford resident, has visited London. She was fifty when she made the visit. By that time, London would have been more accessible, the journey time shorter and her maturity, she felt, would prevent her head being turned by its attractions. For the gaiety, glitter, dazzle, and 'hurly-burly' of this social world is other side of perceptual coin which is conveyed by Gaskell via her characters throughout the novel. For the aristocratic Cumnor family, who kept 'an establishment' in town, London was their natural milieu during 'the season'.[178] They were part of fashionable society who enjoyed the long hours, dinner parties, balls, visits to the theatre and art exhibitions in London. This range of activities was not available in provincial towns like Hollingford and Cranford in which the principal social events were card parties. As part of the 'elegant economy' of Cranford, these evening events finished by nine o' clock and the townspeople were 'abed by half past ten' in order not to burn so many candles! Although poor and modest in their entertaining, the people of Cranford felt themselves to be 'aristocratic', whereas Mrs Gibson's attempt to make life in provincial Hollingford more akin to metropolitan life by introducing continental menus, dinner parties and late hours for the main meal of the day assumes a pretentiousness and veneer of sophistication. Until her arrival such metropolitan activities were confined to house parties in the appropriate social world found at Cumnor Towers, which was a magnet to other city residents who wished to

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[177] Porter, 113. Porter writes, 'London has always had a mixed press'. He equates London's image with Babylon, Sodom and Gomorrah and Babel. 'Babylon' is the epithet attached to London which appears in *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* 101. It is also the connotation found in *Ruth.*

[178] Easson, notes, *Wives and Daughters* 695.

escape the polluted atmosphere of London for 'a breath of country air'(*WD* 41; 106).[179]

Thus Gaskell creates in London an alternative social world, a place which Molly never visits but which holds attractions for the rest of her family, especially for Mrs Gibson, who aspires to life in the upper echelons of fashionable society and for Cynthia, who was not brought up within the social and spatial confines of Hollingford.

The image of country and provincial town life as 'dull' appears in several of these works, associated with characters who are newly arrived and unfamiliar with the place. For instance Edward Holdsworth, having spent a week at Hope Farm, observes, when asked by Paul if he had enjoyed himself: 'Oh! it has been perfect in its way. Such thorough country life! and yet removed from the dulness which I always used to fancy accompanied country life [...]' (*CP* 303).

Before Cynthia arrived in Hollingford her mother expressed her concern that her daughter might find the town 'dull'. Although Cynthia never alludes to the fact, it is implied in her actions. A product of a peripatetic and geographically extensive childhood which determines her fate far more than the influence of Hollingford, she is excited when she learns of a visit she is to make to London and demonstrates her pleasure by waltzing round the drawing room with Molly. Her response to this news confirms the reader's sense that Cynthia would not be content to settle in Hollingford and marry within its ranks. Her eventual marriage to the affluent London-based lawyer Henderson is far more attractive to this social sophisticate than prospective marriage to Hollingford-based academic scientist, Roger Hamley. Although Miss Browning's opinion is that Cynthia's behaviour and manners are inherent and not determined by places like London, there is no doubt that her character was formed outside this narrow provincial world,and at heart she needs the stimulation, gaiety and variety offered by a metropolitan centre. Her uncle, who perceived the difference

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[179] This was a sentiment often expressed by Gaskell herself indicative of the fact that her fiction was 'heartfelt'. Chapple, *The Early Years* 432.

between Molly and Cynthia, was captivated by Cynthia's 'sparkling, quick, witty and graceful' demeanour and realised that she would enjoy and fit into their fashionable, metropolitan world, hence his invitation to stay (*WD* 441). Rather like Mrs Hamley, Cynthia's fate is determined to some extent by her own choices, but those, in turn, are determined by the places in which her formative years were spent. For Cynthia, the metropolis is a greater magnet than the provincial town.

The direction of movement in these novels is mostly from town to metropolis. Lord Hollingford, Roger Hamley and Mr Gibson, whose roots in Hollingford are far deeper than those of Cynthia, move from Hollingford to London to maximise the greater social and intellectual opportunities offered by the metropolis. Uglow suggests that by the 1860's there had been a shift of economic power from the north back to London, which was where the legal and financial power-base was located. The rise of a 'scientifically-led intelligentsia' represented by these men could not be accommodated by Hollingford, for the provincial town can provide a only a limited range of opportunities.[180] For instance, Roger explores the surrounding countryside for floral and faunal specimens, Lord Hollingford has the financial means and physical space at Cumnor Towers to build a laboratory and invite professional colleagues to stay, and Mr Gibson is limited to the reading of journals and applying his expertise to the ailments and ill-health of his patients. In order to further their careers, all three men require the cosmopolitan and metropolitan environment of London which was the hub of the scientific world; so their movement out of Hollingford demonstrates that the metropolitan environment plays a part in determining their fate. The futures of all three men (and Cynthia's fate too) are inextricably linked to the metropolitan environment. For instance, Mr Gibson is summoned as a consultant to advise about Lady Cumnor's treatment and his recommendation of an operation is accepted. Whilst in London he is able to indulge his intellectual interests by meeting like-minded individuals and visiting major exhibitions and museums. He takes advantage of

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[180] Uglow 586.

Cynthia's wedding to pursue these interests and perhaps extend his reputation as a fine surgeon.

However, two of Gaskell's characters move from London to Hollingford to contrasting fates. Mrs Hamley has moved from the physical 'crowd of houses' and social world of 'the park and the play' (which is her husband's rather disparagingly reduced image of London),[181] to his country estate of Hamley Hall. The squire fails to accompany his wife when she returns to visit her home city after her marriage. Eventually these visits cease and Mrs Hamley, taken out of her natural physical and social environment, fails to survive. She ails-her illness non-specific- and eventually she fades out of life without even the tribute of a funeral to mark her demise. Recent commentators who have used Darwinian theory to analyse Gaskell's themes in *Wives and Daughters* could highlight Mrs Hamley as an example of his principle of the survival of the fittest.[182] Gaskell never alludes to a physical illness, so whatever was wrong with Mrs Hamley, Gaskell is pointing the deterministic finger at her failure to adapt to life in Hollingford. However, as always, Gaskell tempers this rather rigid view by commenting that it was partly the result of Mrs Hamley's innate qualities of gentleness, tenderness and goodness which prevented her from enjoying London life when the Squire was unable to share these joys:

> Mrs Hamley was a great reader, and had considerable literary taste. She was gentle and sentimental; tender and good. She gave up her visits to London; she gave up her sociable pleasure in the company of fellows in education and position [...] He (the Squire) loved his wife more dearly for her sacrifices for him; but, deprived of all her strong interests, she sank into ill-health; nothing definite; only she never was well. (*WD* 41-2)

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[181] Mark Girouard, *Cities and People* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985) 191. The Squire's perception is in fact an accurate description of London according to Girouard who explains that because 'the season' was so short; only about four months long, the desire was to maximise enjoyment, therefore 'pleasure gardens were the result'. Once again Gaskell is social historian in the guise of creative writer.

[182] Notably Deirdre D'Albertis, *Dissembling Fictions.*(London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997) 137-159.

Although her interests and enjoyment of life were determined by her move from a metropolitan to a provincial environment, Gaskell makes it clear that she chose her fate. Easson stresses in his introduction that events are determined by character and situations arising from character and throughout the 'chance' factors play a role in influencing 'what happens' because 'fate is a cunning hussy' (*WD* 75). Nevertheless underpinning the serendipity of daily life in Gaskell's provincial towns lies a fundamental belief in the deterministic link between people and their environment. Mr Harrison's destiny was to remain in the provincial town in which he went to work because he fell in love with the vicar's daughter. Young and, apparently, easily adaptable, he found happiness in a place about which he had reservations. When his London-based old friend, Jack Marshland, stopped in Duncombe on his way home, Frank wanted his friend to have a 'taste of the life he led from months end to months end', so they spent all evening at Tomkinson's with only 'coffee and bread-and butter' and no dinner! (*Mr H* 383)

The integration of the London as a socio-spatial world into the narrative fabric of *Wives and Daughters* is part of Gaskell's literary achievement in her final novel.[183] This integration is achieved by character movement which, although controlled by the author rather than shared by the reader as they are in *Mary Barton,* create narrative dynamism and reinforce the sense of a wider world in which Hollingford plays a part. It is noticeable that although other members of the family go to London, Molly never ventures beyond the immediate environs of Hollingford. In addition the links between the two socio-spatial worlds highlight Mrs Gibson's pretension, the provincialism of Hollingford and the deterministic role of place.

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[183] Easson considers that what was to be her final novel was 'her crowning achievement and an artistic masterpiece'. He considered authorial control to be part of that achievement. Easson, introduction, *Wives and Daughters* ix.

NARRATIVE STRUCTURE AND NARRATIVE LINKS

As has already been discussed the structural foundation of Gaskell's provincial novels are based on a single place-either town (*Cranford* and *Mr Harrison's Confessions*), country estate, (*My Lady Ludlow*) or farm (*Cousin Phillis*) or on a more complex structure of interactive socio-spatial realms as in the case of *Wives and Daughters.* Character movements within and between places create narrative links, generate narrative drive, and control narrative pace. Discussion of this movement is vital to a complete appraisal of the literary-spatial interface within Gaskell's writing. Ironically however, within these supposedly small localised provincial writings, there is a global distribution of places but, as has already been suggested, the structural base is nodal rather than axiological.

Whilst the narrative principally followed Mary's movements in her first novel, so the physically separate socio-spatial realms necessitate focus on the movement of more than one character in her final work. Reference to the schematic diagram for *Wives and Daughters* shows that there are three central characters, Mr Gibson, Molly and Roger, who move between most or all of these socio-spatial realms of the novel.(See Fig.6.1) However, Roger spends prolonged periods away from Hollingford, therefore the focus of the narrative drive falls upon the surgeon and his daughter.

Morris, in her introduction to the novel comments that:

> the narrative unfolds with a sense of unhurried spaciousness [...] . The early chapters shuttle smoothly and deftly backwards and forwards in time, constructing a richly interconnected sense of social community and history from which the story is to develop. However, underlying this leisurely evolutionary pace there is a firm narrative drive.[184]

Mr Gibson plays a strategic role in the narrative, particularly at the outset, for he instigates the narrative, propels it forward, and thus provides the links which unify the socio-spatial worlds of Hollingford. As the doctor for a fifteen mile radius of

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[184] Morris, introduction, *Wives and Daughters* x. See also Easson, *Elizabeth Gaskell* (London: Routledge,1979) 198. He comments that: 'there is sustained control of the narrative flow in which the characters are prepared for, and the background both natural and social is detailed and dramatically effective.'

Hollingford, he has patients from all echelons of society, from Lady Cumnor to the tenant farmers and cottagers of the area. It is hardly surprising perhaps that Gaskell should select a country doctor as the lynch-pin of her narrative on two counts. Firstly, she wanted to write a social geography of a provincial town, so it is entirely appropriate that she used the peripatetic doctor, who is universally acceptable within that hierarchical society, to provide both the physical and social links. It must also be appreciated that her knowledge of such a role stems from personal experience, which is perhaps the reason why the role of surgeon also appears in *Mr Harrison's Confessions*. As a child brought up in Knutsford, she spent time with her uncle Peter Holland, who was the country surgeon for Knutsford for 40 years. She accompanied him on his rounds and would have been as well known to those in his sphere of influence as Molly was to the cottage dweller who lived close to Croston Heath:[185]

> She went along the lane under the over-arching elm-branches, [...] past the last cottage where a little child had tumbled down the sloping bank and was publishing the accident with frightened cries. Molly stooped to pick it up, [...] and carried it [...] towards the cottage which she supposed to be its home. The mother came running [...] on seeing her, the little creature held out its arms to go to her, [...] and she began to soothe it [...] interspersing her lulling with thanks to Molly. She called her by name; and on Molly asking the woman how she came to know it, she replied that she had been a servant of Mrs Goodenough before her marriage, and so was 'bound to know Dr Gibson's daughter by sight'.(*WD* 483)

This moment in the novel appears strikingly biographical, as is the occasion in which Mr Gibson arrives home unexpectedly having borrowed a dog-cart with the expectation of taking Molly and Cynthia for a ride part-way as he visited a patient in an outlying area. Presumably, Cynthia did not ride; nor were there three horses available, hence the need for the dog-cart. Country surgeons covered large areas, but perhaps not as large as those of Gaskell's fictitious characters. Mr Morgan, assisted by Frank Harrison, had a catchment area of 30 miles, double that of Mr Gibson. In fact if

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[185] Mrs Gaskell was able to ride and her letters record the fact that she rode round the lanes of Cheshire after her marriage in Manchester. It can be assumed that she and her uncle rode together when she was a child in Knutsford. *Letters,* 6; 15.

these writings are biographically inspired the distances may not be accurate, for both radii would encompass the built up area of Manchester, which seems rather unlikely.[186]

In her final work, Gaskell's focus rests upon the upper echelons in society in contrast to her previous novels and it is via a 'chance' encounter that Gibson, accompanied by Molly, has with Lord Cumnor who is on a 'pottering expedition' around his demesne that his daughter is issued with an invitation to 'The Towers' on the occasion of their 'open day' for the townswomen of Hollingford.

> Once a year she was condescending. She [...] had set up a school [...] . The various unoccupied gentlewomen of the town responded to the call of their liege lady and gave her their service as required [...] In return, there was a day of honour set apart every summer, when with much gracious and stately hospitality, Lady Cumnor and her daughters received all the school visitors at the 'Towers.' (*WD* 3-4)[187]

As a child of twelve, Molly goes from the modest middle class world of her home in the town of Hollingford into the aristocratic world of Cumnor Towers. It is the first link in the chain of events and movements connecting the spatial and social worlds which provide the structural foundations of the novel. Having instigated the first strategic link the narrative is then propelled forward through Gibson's professional relationship with Mrs Hamley. Alongside his visits to see the invalid wife of the squire who represents the landed gentry of the area, Gaskell creates a personal relationship between the two men based on mutual respect and liking which serves to highlight Gibson's universal social acceptability in Hollingford. Gibson's domestic

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[186] Chapple records the difficulty Peter Holland, (Gaskell's uncle whose practice was based in Knutsford) experienced when he attended the Earl of Stamford's wife at Dunham Hall near Altrincham only to find that he had broken one of the rules of his apprenticeship. Under these rules he was not permitted to practise within a ten-mile radius of Manchester. Chapple, *The Early Years* 145. It seems that Gaskell may not have checked the map when she designated these radial distances for her fictional surgeons. To oversee his estate Lord Cumnor could travel 36 miles in one day so perhaps she considered this a feasible and realistic distance. Therefore Mr Gibson's catchment area was based on a day's travel rather than any medical ruling.

[187] The inspiration for this link between townspeople and the 'big house' is derived directly from the Egertons at Tatton Hall. Mrs Egerton had built St Mary's School in 1816 near to the Knutsford entrance to Tatton Park. Chapple, *The Early Years* 131. Clearly too, Gaskell was aware of, and sensitive to, the attitude of condescension which existed between the aristocracy and the provincial town dwellers.

arrangements are determined by professional responsibilities as well as family circumstances. The combination of Mrs Hamley's need for a companion in her illness and the impossibility of Molly's unchaperoned life at home are obviated by Gibson's agreement to Molly's visit to Hamley. Just as the narrative followed Molly's journey to Cumnor Towers, so the reader travels with Molly in the Hamley carriage through the Hollingford countryside to the Hall. Gaskell's technique of allowing the reader the privilege of accompanying the characters, as they move between places provides a clear sense of narrative movement which is reminiscent of *Mary Barton* and *Sylvia's Lovers*. By the beginning of the third instalment of the novel, Gaskell has introduced and linked the major social realms of their home in Hollingford, the town and its inhabitants, and the two country estates, through the movements of Mr Gibson and Molly to provide unity, but chiefly to demonstrate the social interaction which existed between these contrasting socio-spatial realms.

After Gibson's marriage to Hyacinth Kirkpatrick, which not only forges already established links but introduces new and outside influences into Hollingford society, Gibson's role in the narrative drive fades into the background, although there are moments when he comes to the fore again to increase narrative pace and raise dramatic tension. Such a moment is his confrontation with Cynthia after he discovers that Molly's integrity has been compromised.

As Molly's attention becomes absorbed by the demands of her stepmother and her daughter, Cynthia , so her company on Mr Gibson's rounds almost cease, as the doctor comes and goes from the house alone and the reader remains with the protagonist. Molly becomes chiefly responsible for generating narrative drive as she walks and rides about Hollingford. Her encounters occasion moments of high dramatic tension which move the story forwards. Other characters move less. Cynthia's movements are confined to an axis between the continent, the Gibson home in Hollingford, and London. Mrs Gibson's axis of movement is limited being circumscribed by her social ambitions. She moves between her home, Cumnor Towers, and London infrequently. The Squire and his wife barely move off the estate during the course of the novel,

whereas Osborne and Roger move around Hollingford visiting when they are at home. Otherwise their movements take them further afield to places beyond the novel's narrative catchment area. The most mobile of Hollingford's population are the upper echelons of society, for it must be remembered that in these days before the railway, towns such as Hollingford were rendered remote because the majority of the population was not mobile. Only the aristocracy could afford long distance travel, although admittedly, middle class professionals in Hollingford were able to make infrequent trips to larger centres like London. However, because Molly goes nowhere the narrative remains firmly rooted in Hollingford.

Constantly in the background, the sense of daily rhythm and movement which has been recognised in earlier work is in evidence in Hollingford, where it comes to the fore for dramatic purposes, The domestic rhythms of provincial society continue throughout the narrative of *Wives and Daughters* in much the same way as they do in Cranford. In the former they are punctuated by little more than Mrs Gibson's uncharacteristic irascibility, and major events like the Charity Ball and Osborne's death which increase the narrative pace. Superimposed upon the daily pattern of tea drinking, card parties and visiting in Cranford are visitors from beyond the town, whereas Hollingford has a seasonal rhythm associated with the family at the great house. Lord and Lady Cumnor, as members of the aristocracy, spend 'the season in London'. Gaskell defines this period of the year as February to July, which coincided with the Parliamentary session. When Parliament rose, the aristocracy left London for their country retreats. 'The family,' as they were called, came down for their autumn sojourn at the Towers' as they might have been for scores of autumns past,'[188] and these seasonal visits play a pivotal role in the story. The impact of their visits provides a significant structural component of the narrative. By creating another connected, but distinctive, social world, it helps to vary narrative pace, provide

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[188] In the early nineteenth century, travel was still difficult and in the winter months the roads were frequently impassable, therefore movement in the summer was much easier. Slater, *A History of Warwickshire* (Chichester: Phillimore,1997) 94.

narrative dynamic by galvanising movement of the characters, and influences the physical townscape of Hollingford.

There a few references to the fact that when the family is in residence, Hollingford is on the periphery of a social whirl, as Cumnor Towers is full of 'lords and ladies' and, latterly, scientific friends of Lord Hollingford. The one and only sentence which informs the reader about the way in which the aristocracy occupy their time is written in reference to Cynthia's 'old antipathy to the great family': 'The house was full of visitors [...] the Earl and Countess, Lord Hollingford and Lady Harriet, lords and ladies in general, liveries, dresses, bags of game and rumours of riding parties were as nothing to her'(*WD* 371). This hunting, shooting world which was typical of the Knutsford area, whilst peripheral to the social realm of Cumnor Towers, raises an important environmental issue and plays a significant role in demonstrating the deterministic role of the Hamley estate on that family. More important to the narrative is the way in which the impact of the family's visits galvanises movement and increases narrative pace. In her first draft of the novel, Gaskell attached paramount importance to the return of the Cumnor family for it reads: 'The approach to Easter brought many distractions to the course of Hollingford affairs. The grandest and greatest of all was the return of the Earl and Countess with their family to the Towers'.[189]

However, rather than the authorial statement found in the manuscript, the published version conveys a sense of dynamism previously unseen in the novel:

> Mr Sheepshanks (the Cumnor estate agent) might be seen trotting up and down on his stout old cob, speaking to attentive masons, plasterers and glaziers about putting everything–on the outside at least–about the cottages belonging to 'my lord,' in perfect repair [...] . So the ladders of whitewashers and painters were sadly in the way of ladies tripping daintily along to make their purchases, and holding up the gowns in a bunch behind [...] . The housekeeper and steward from the Towers might also be seen coming in to give orders at the various shops [...] .'(*WD* 286)

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[189] Easson, notes, *Wives and Daughters* 710.

Hollingford is 'in an unusual bustle of activity' due to the coincidence of 'the expected return of the family to the Towers after their unusually long absence;' Easter; and the triennial Charity Ball. This bustle of activity is matched on a subsequent occasion when 'the house was 'full of visitors and the Towers servants, and carriages and liveries were seen in the two streets of Hollingford' (*WD* 371). In this phase of the novel, narrative pace increases because it is the process rather than the effects of the change which are described. So Hollingford becomes a dynamic town, just as the advent of Signor Brunoni brought activity to Cranford in what is otherwise a novel with a leisurely pace. The narrative rose to a crescendo of dramatic tension as Mary and her party awaited the appearance of Signor Brunoni. The sense of anticlimax was palpable when he failed to appear, but the whole episode increased narrative pace. A spate of burglaries in the town caused the genteel ladies concern about their safety and raised the tension as they moved about on their usual rounds of visits. It must be said however, that the potential danger raised the heart rates of the population rather than the narrative pace of the tale.

Whenever the Cumnor family comes to Hollingford, links between townspeople and the great house are forged. Some are determined by patronage, as 'the gentlewomen of the town who responded to the call of their liege lady' were rewarded with a 'day of honour' (*WD* 4) in the summer, but there is an especially close connection between the big house and the Gibson household principally via Lady Harriet, Mrs Gibson and Molly. Usually Lady Harriet visits her old governess soon after she arrives and issues an invitation to Mrs Gibson to visit 'the great house' and the Cumnor carriage either is sent to collect her or is put at her disposal for the journey home. Lady Harriet's visits create a narrative dynamic because they provoke more movement of the characters around Hollingford. Mrs Gibson is quite open and shameless in her attempts to persuade Molly to walk to Holly Farm to collect some damsons and then to call on the Miss Brownings in order to lengthen her absence from home on the occasion of one of Lady Harriet's visits. That aristocratic lady having exchanged news with Mrs Gibson, went to call on the Miss Brownings in the hope of seeing

Molly but missed her. Later in the novel, it is Lady Harriet who instigates considerable movement of characters about the town when she decides that she can assist to restore Molly's blackened reputation amongst the townsfolk by example. She visits the Miss Brownings to establish whether the rumours have truth in them. In her return ride home, she and her father fortuitously meet Preston, who is also on horseback, and she questions him directly about his relationship with Molly. Some days afterwards:

> She experienced no difficulty in carrying off the unconscious Molly for a walk, which Lady Harriet so contrived that they twice passed through all the length of the principal street of the town, loitered at Grinstead's (the social centre of the town) for half an hour, and wound up by Lady Harriet's calling on the Miss Brownings, who, to her regret, were not at home [...] . 'Perhaps it is as well,' said she, [...] 'I'll leave my card and put your name down underneath it, Molly.' (*WD* 560)

Lady Harriet's remark once they have parted and Molly is out of earshot serves to underline the provincial nature of Hollingford society: 'We've done a good day's work! [...] . Hollingford is not the place I take it to be, if it doesn't veer round in Miss Gibson's favour after my today's trotting of that child about' (*WD* 561).

However, the seasonal cyclical nature of visits broke down under Lady Cumnor's illness. The 'comparative quiet' of the ancestral home provided respite from the 'hurly-burly of London' but failed to cure her (*WD* 91). As a result the family became 'wanderers in search of health' and so curtailed their visits to Hollingford in favour of resorts like Bath and Spa in Belgium. It is highly likely that Gaskell would have known about the fashionable resort of Spa in Belgium, and from Dumbleton in Gloucestershire she went to Cheltenham Spa, so she may well have visited Bath.[190] However, finally she required an operation in London which necessitated the need for

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[190] Gaskell may have visited Spa for she describes a 'lovely little plan of Belgian and Rhine Towns', they had made in 1858, 'a month at Heidelberg for sketching and then home.' *Letters* 513. Spa lies in the Ardennes forest in what is now eastern Belgium. 'Its warm natural springs and pastoral scenery made it a fashionable watering place among the European nobility who came to drink and bathe in the artificially constructed pools.' Amanda Foreman, *Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire.* (London: Harper Collins, 1998) 11. This description of Spa highlights the appropriateness of Gaskell's choice of resort for Lady Cumnor, even if she had not visited the town.

rest and recuperation in the fresh country of air of Hollingford, so 'there was every probability that "the family" would make a longer residence than usual'(*WD* 552). The irregularity of the family's visits to Hollingford were determined by the fact that Lady Cumnor was ill and by her need to seek for both suitable places for a cure, and rest and recuperation after her operation. The spa resorts of Bath and Spa, the 'smoothness of the luxury' the 'fresh air' and 'comparative quiet' (*WD* 101; 91) of Cumnor Towers determined the frequency and timing of family visits to their country residence during the course of the story.

To some extent the plot pivots on their arrival and presence in Hollingford, as they play a deterministic role in the fate of others. Mrs Kirkpatrick returned to the Towers as a consequence of Lady Cumnor's need for the 'comparative quiet' of her ancestral home before the 'season' had finished (*WD* 91) because Lady Harriet could not accompany her mother as a companion. Hyacinth Kirkpatrick's proximity and accessibility to Mr Gibson resulted in his proposal of marriage, as he was concerned about Molly's compromising position as the only woman in their household. That seasonal visit by the family culminated in the wedding. The climax of the following visit was the Charity Ball and the expectation of seeing 'the Duchess of Menteith and her diamonds' (*WD* 299). This event gave Gaskell the opportunity to depict social nuances and prejudices which characterise a provincial environment as everyone was gathered in one place.

On a later occasion, over lunch at the Gibson's to which Lady Harriet had invited herself to prolong the solitude which she could not obtain from a houseful of visitors, she divulges the news that Roger has been selected to benefit from the Crichton legacy which has been left for scientific exploration, which will necessitate his absence from England for a prolonged period. Finally, on the last occasion that 'the family' arrive in Hollingford, they remain for the duration of the narrative in which the secrecy surrounding Cynthia is unravelled and culminates in a stay at the Towers for Molly during which she renews her acquaintance with Roger Hamley, who has returned for Osborne's funeral. Undoubtedly, the seasonal movement of the upper

echelons of Hollingford society plays an important role, both in determining the narrative dynamic and in determining the fate of the characters.

Running parallel to and threading through the seasonal movements of the aristocrats and daily movements of the local surgeon, is the narrative dynamic provided by the fortunes of the Hamleys and the agricultural economy of the estate. In order to educate his sons, the squire has to fell and sell timber, a strategy which he much regrets. However, it reaps no reward in the case of Osborne, who fails to achieve his parents' ambitions of a first class degree and a fellowship. Instead he accumulates debts which necessitate more financial stringency on the estate at the expense of his father's rural workers and the financial health of the estate. The abandonment of the reclamation scheme and mortgage of the land are necessary to repay these debts. Relations between eldest son and father become strained. Physically and temperamentally unsuited to his destiny of landowning farmer, Osborne marries secretly (and totally unacceptably in the Squire's eyes) and, despite his attempt to control his own destiny, dies from congenital heart disease. Like his mother, he is given no funeral neither has he the ability to adapt to his environment. Roger's destiny , as the younger son, was not tied to the estate, but he made good use of his father's financial and the estate's natural resources to pursue his ambitions to become a renowned scientist. Roger was master of his own destiny, and both sons move in and out of Hollingford creating narrative dynamic.

Whilst the seasonal rhythms of aristocratic movement are well-established, those associated with the social links made through common interest in science are new. The spirit of change pervades the novel both at the local level as the Cumnors come and go and, more universally, as social barriers are broken down due to the advent of science.[191] Roger's departures from Hollingford are determined by his bursary to

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[191] The chronology in this novel is correct. For instance, the Royal Geographical Society's activities are accurate. However, there is a sense in which Gaskell is viewing the scientific world through the spectacles of the 1860's rather than a perspective concurrent with the time setting of the novel of the late 1820's. Lansbury shares this view suggesting that 'Roger Hamley, like Darwin, speaks from Gaskell's own day.' Coral Lansbury *Elizabeth Gaskell: The Novel of Social Crisis* (London: Paul Elek, 1975) 194. The current trend is for 'Post-Darwinian' readings of *Wives and Daughters* on the basis that

travel to Africa to extend scientific knowledge, but the narrative stays firmly in Hollingford. Mr Gibson is summoned to London by Lady Cumnor, Cynthia and her mother visit relations in the metropolis, but little narrative drive is thus instigated for the reader is left in the daily social round of Hollingford gaining insights into these distant worlds by epistolary evidence. These characters return to galvanise an otherwise slow narrative into action, instances of which have already been discussed. Opportunities in *Wives and Daughters* lie beyond Hollingford: to maximise them the characters must move out of the town. For those who remain behind, creating their own quiet happiness and maintaining honesty and integrity, fulfilment arrives in time. The re-acquaintance of Molly and Roger at a house party at the home of Lord Hollingford symbolises the spirit of change that pervades Hollingford, as the boundaries between the aristocracy, gentry and middle classes dissolve. This social change is determined in part by the individuals, and partly by their common interest in scientific and intellectual matters. Molly transgresses the gender divide that recent commentators are so keen to erect by her quiet, consistent self-education which enables her to converse on equal terms and gain the respect of Lord Hollingford and

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Darwin made his voyage on the Beagle in 1839; *The Origin of Species* was published in 1859 and the gestation period of the novel dates from 1864. Gaskell seems to be inherently convinced of Darwinian principles of adaptation and survival and aware of the debate between nature and nurture as these ideas underpin even her earliest writing. D'Albertis suggests that 'textual reference to Darwin has been dismissed as coincidental' and that most studies of the influence of 'Darwin's influence on writing of the period has failed to address the issue of his importance for Gaskell.' D'Albertis, 214-215. She highlights Uglow and Schor who see Roger Hamley as a 'Darwin surrogate.' However, it is instructive to note that although it is agreed that the theme of evolution pervades *Wives and Daughters*, at moments of high dramatic tension, Gaskell resorts to the imagery of 'catastrophism',(a philosophy at odds with the concept of evolution) that was the alternative theory to that of uniformitarianism ('the present is the key to the past') in the geological sciences. There are two notable moments, both of which depict Molly in emotional crisis. The first occasion is when her father breaks the news of his proposed re-marriage. Molly felt, 'as if the piece of solid ground on which she stood had broken from the shore and she was drifting out to the infinite sea alone.' *WD* 114. (Contemporary geological theory would suggest that this image is evocative of 'plate tectonic theory'.). On the second occasion, Roger has left Hollingford with an 'understanding between himself and Cynthia. Gaskell describes Molly's state of mind thus: 'For a few minutes her brain seemed in too great a whirl to comprehend anything but that she was being carried on in earth's diurnal course with rocks, stones and trees with as little volition on her part as if she were dead.' *WD* 391. Uglow draws attention to these contrasting approaches from the geological sciences. Uglow 561.

the love of Roger Hamley.[192] For these reasons, it is possible to concur with Greenwood's view that Molly will marry Roger and adapt to life in London despite the fact that she has never before left Hollingford. Molly loves her provincial home town and its pleasant rural landscape and whilst it has determined her values, its social confines have not stultified her maturity.[193]

A Dark Night's Work-A brief Sojourn in Rome

Ellinor Wilkins, on the other hand, is perceived by Ralph Corbet to be a product of Hamley, the provincial focus of *A Dark Night's Work*. Unaccepted socially at assemblies, with little knowledge of life beyond Ford Bank and provincial Hamley and with a 'skeleton in the wardrobe', she is not considered by Corbet to be a suitable wife for an ambitious and aspiring lawyer in London. Ellinor fits into the theme of adaptation, for so conditioned is she by the provincialism of Hamley she is considered not to be able to adapt to a new environment. Ironically however, she is a character who moves the narrative further afield than many in Gaskell's provincial writings. In order to escape from impecunity after the death of her father, she lets Ford Bank and she moves to the fictional town of East Chester.[194] From there, due to ill-health, she journeys to Rome for what was planned as a prolonged stay of months. Throughout the story these places help to drive the narrative forward, and they play a deterministic role in Ellinor's destiny. When located in Hamley, the pace of the story was slow, determined by the provincial environment and the day-to-day events which had occurred. Ellinor exchanges the confines and peace of Hamley for the quiet cathedral town of East Chester. Like Hollingford and Cranford, the pace of life here is

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[192] D'Albertis comments that a post-Darwinian reading enlightens the reader about Gaskell's 'use of narrative patterns derived from evolutionary theory to expand her critique of gender constructs in Victorian society' D'Albertis 215.

[193] There is a contrast here with Philip, who was emotionally disabled partly by the confines of Monkshaven.

[194] The inspiration for the cathedral town of East Chester is derived from her enforced stay in Winchester in 1861. Uglow comments, 'as she slowly recovered she grew to love the quiet precincts, like those whose calm soothes Ellinor Wilkins in *A Dark Night's Work*.' Uglow 489. Gaskell also used this experience in *Sylvia's Lovers* as the inspiration for the place of Philip's recuperation after the war.

slow; her days are punctuated by arrivals and events many of which are visible from her centrally located home in the close. She is able to see Ralph married and observe the new canon both at cathedral services and at the parochial school in which she helps on a voluntary basis. Mr Livingstone, who has maintained his love for Ellinor since Hamley days is a crucial link in the narrative for, having been appointed Dean, he meets her again in East Chester and it is he who brings the news of Dixon's committal for trial to her in Rome.

The narrative spell in Rome, although short, is the dramatic climax of the story. Gaskell interweaves the place into Ellinor's life as she rediscovers her youth, which had been 'cut so suddenly short by the shears of fate' (*ADNW* 129). Although it was unfamiliar territory, Ellinor found it delightful and joyous, just as Gaskell had when she visited and met Charles Eliot Norton. The lively gaiety of the scene in a real place leaps up from the page as Gaskell provides a tiny scrap of mappable Rome (see Fig 6.4).The map is possible because she includes at least three addresses.[195] (*ADNW* 129)

The Forbes family together with Ellinor celebrates the Lenten festival by throwing bouquets of flowers and watching the parade from their balcony. Into the noisy happy scene, so typical of Italian towns at this season, came Mr Livingstone. From the heights of pleasure and happiness, Ellinor is plunged into the depths of despair and has to make hasty arrangements to travel home to be present at the trial. Just as Gaskell used the gay Roman street scene prior to Livingstone's news to demonstrate Ellinor's emotional state, so she uses the delayed and interminable journey home to create dramatic tension. The ferry's engine failure which causes commotion on board the vessel is evocatively described by Gaskell, inspired by her first hand experience of such a calamity in her return from Rome in 1857:

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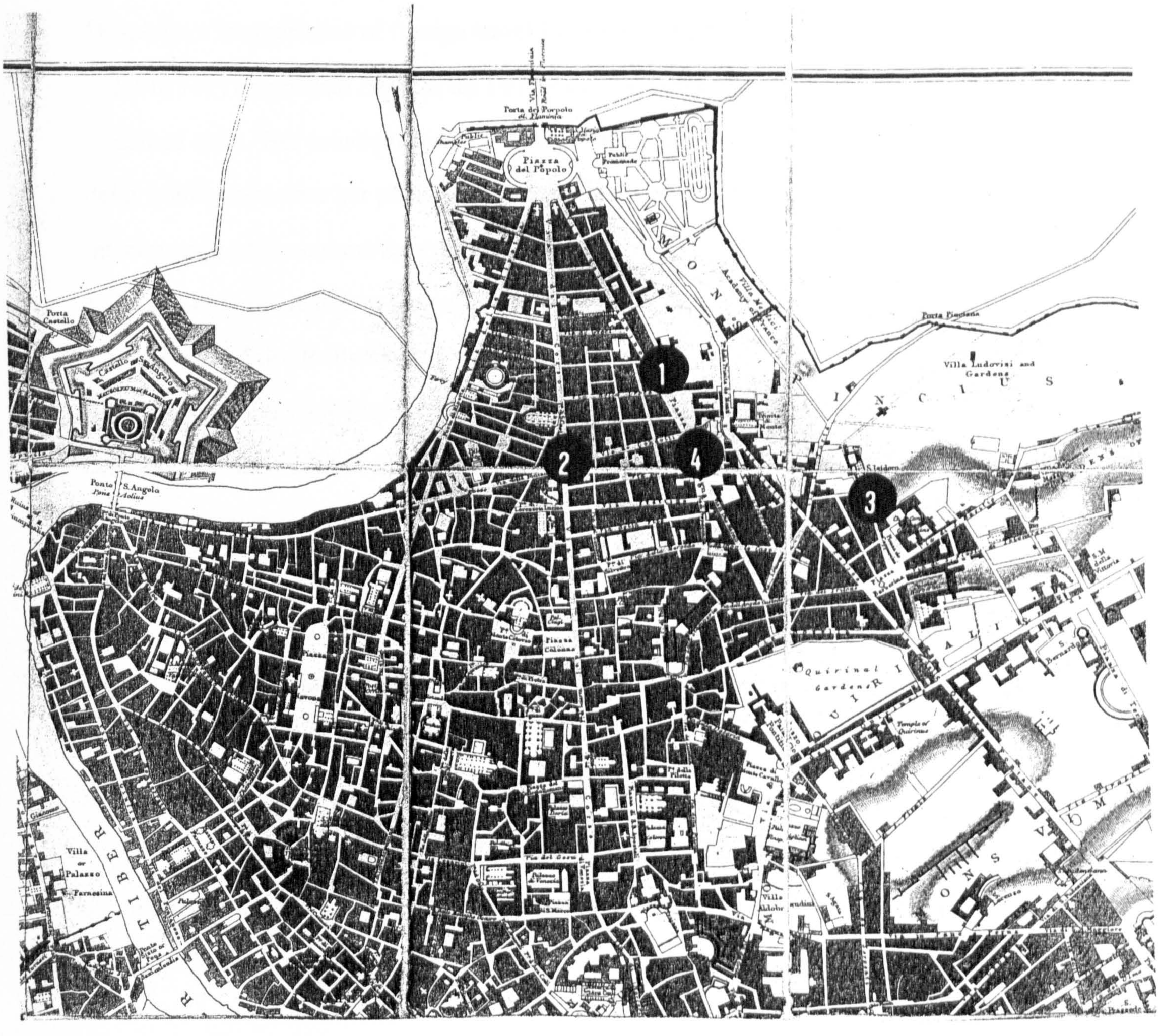
[195] This short story is another example of Gaskell's subtle mix of real and fictional places. It is the larger urban centres that are real, the provincial remain fictionalised.



1. **No. 36 Babuino** - Ellinor's lodgings	3. **Via di San Isidoro** – Gaskell stayed at the home of the Whetmore Story's
2. **Via del Corso** – the location of the balcony from where Ellinor viewed the Carnival	4. **Via Condotti** – joins the main Via del Corso

Fig. 6.4 A Tiny Scrap of Mappable Rome

Source: John Murray, *A Handbook for Travellers in Central Italy* Part II *Rome and its environs* (London: John Murray, 1853)

> Suddenly there was a shock and stound all over the vessel, her progress was stopped, and a rocking vibration was felt everywhere. The quarter-deck was filled with blasts of steam, which obscured everything. Sick people came rushing up out of their berths in strange undress; the steerage passengers–a motley and picturesque set of people, in many varieties of gay costume–took refuge on the quarter-deck, speaking loudly in all varieties of French and Italian *patois*. (*ADNW* 141)

Despite her inexperience of foreign travel Ellinor stood up 'in wondering dismay' (*ADNW* 141) rather than fright at the turn of events. Unlike her fellow passengers, she remained quiet. Her principal concern was to reach Dixon in time for the trial and this delay could jeopardise her plans. By using her well-tried and tested technique of interweaving place and movement into the narrative, Gaskell creates dramatic tension and a desire in the reader to continue the tale.[196]

The Advent of the Railway

Structurally the railway plays a pivotal role in the narrative dynamics of two of Gaskell's shorter works of fiction; *A Dark Night's Work* and *Cousin Phillis*. In the following section this role will be discussed in relation to each of the stories in turn.

A Dark Night's Work.

The advent of the railway, which was the root of so much of the socio-economic change at the beginning of the nineteenth century, certainly brought changes to Ellinor Wilkins' life. The railway takes hold of the narrative of *A Dark Night's Work* from the moment when news of the exhumation of Dunster's body and Dixon's committal for trial was broken to Ellinor. Prior to that moment, as Easson points out, the railway has made its appearance in 'scarcely more than an aside.'[197] By this stage in the tale, Dunster and Mr Wilkins are dead and Ellinor has let 'Ford Bank' and

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[196] Just as her experience in Winchester inspired the fictional East Chester, so her visit to Rome in 1857 is immortalised in *A Dark Night's Work*. The delay on the return journey because of a burst boiler happened to Gaskell's party on their outward journey. Gaskell adored Rome, where she met Charles Eliot Norton. Uglow comments, 'It would be too strong to say that Elizabeth fell in love with Charles. He was part of her Italian romance and she fell in love with the whole experience.' Uglow, 418. There is no doubt that the short interlude of happy festive scenes encountered by Ellinor when she visits Rome encapsulates much of Gaskell's experience of that city and relieves the sombre, dark tension which has characterised the story up to that point. The change of place symbolises and epitomises a change of atmosphere.

[197] Easson, *Elizabeth Gaskell* 219.

moved to East Chester. Legal business associated with her legacy from Mr Ness necessitates a brief return to Hamley. Despite feeling 'timorous' about this new form of transport, Ellinor travels part of the distance by train, but the railway is still ten miles from Hamley; a strategic piece of information in the light of what is to happen, imparted by Gaskell prior to Ellinor's arrival in the town. Whilst she is staying in Hamley, she becomes aware of surveyors with their equipment in the fields beyond the parsonage. Dixon, when asked what these men were doing, expresses his view of the innovation thus:

> 'Them's the people for the new railway. Nought would satisfy the Hamley folk but to have a railway all to themselves'[...] . He spoke with a tone of personal offence natural to a man who had passed all his life among horses, and considered railway-engines as their despicable rivals' (*ADNW* 121).

An alteration to the route of the railway results in the exhumation of Dunster's body from beneath the trees in the grounds of Ford Bank and determines the later climactic events of her life as Dixon is accused of the murder of Dunster. The culmination of the tale is focused upon another journey made by Ellinor. In order to gain clemency for Dixon she travels to London to appeal to the judge, Ralph Corbet, her former fiancé who had tried his case. Gaskell builds the dramatic tension by allowing the reader to accompany Ellinor on her journey and heightens it as an overnight wait is necessitated by Corbet's absence from home. This section of the novel is highly reminiscent of Gaskell's dramatic techniques in *Mary Barton* as the protagonist's movement through a townscape drives the narrative towards its climax. Unlike most of her other provincial writings, the narrative is driven towards its climax by both movement of character and the changing location of the narrative itself, which creates dramatic tension, stimulates narrative pace, and opens up the possibility of a future life to Ellinor of which she became the arbiter. Distance from the scene of the crime and a spatial extension of her experience to the fictional cathedral town of East Chester, the Mediterranean city of Rome, and the metropolis of London, enabled her to shed a destiny which had previously been determined by small town life existence. Mr Wilkins' death initiates movement away from Hamley, and narrative pace

increases as Ellinor travels. The advent of the railway in the latter part of *A Dark Night's Work* triggers a sequence of events, the consequence of which is Dixon's reprieve; Ellinor's freedom to marry; and subsequent happiness with Livingstone.

Cousin Phillis

The isolation, peace and tranquillity of the small rural world created in *Cousin Phillis* is shattered by the railway from the beginning of the story, although the change appears gradual as it occurs simultaneously with the building of the railway. Unlike Dickens, whose masterly set-piece evocation of the physical impact of the railway on Camden Town is well-known,[198] Gaskell weaves the impact of railway construction into the heart of the narrative. Paul and Holdsworth are railway engineers concerned with the practicalities of construction. Although modern technology is seen to overcome the physical constraints of the particular environment, Paul wrote to his father about these difficulties: 'I told my father of the bogs, all over wild myrtle and soft moss, and shaking ground over which we had to carry our line'(*CP* 223).[199] As the branch line approaches Heathbridge so the realisation dawns on Paul's mother of the proximity of her cousin, who farms locally, so he seeks them out. The relationships which develop correlate with the gradual building of the line. Holdsworth is introduced to the enclosed pastoral world only after he has been ill, his 'low fever, perhaps' determined by the location of another line of which he was in

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[198] Charles Dickens, *Dombey and Son* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974).

> The first shock of the earthquake, had just at that period, rent the whole of the neighbourhood to its centre. Traces of its course were visible on every side. Houses were knocked down; streets were broken through and stopped; deep pits and trenches were dug in the ground; enormous heaps of earth and clay were thrown up; buildings that were undermined and shaking, propped by great beams of wood [...] .

Dickens 120. The description continues emphasising the enormous impact on the physical environment of Camden Town. The difference between Gaskell and Dickens could not be more marked, nevertheless, in their own ways they demonstrate the far-reaching implications of this technological change for the inhabitants of metropolis and provincial town.

[199] Leo H. Grindon *Country Rambles and Manchester Walks and Wild Flowers* (Manchester, 1882) 249. Grindon mentions bog-mrytle as an indigenous species of the 'mosses' of Lancashire and Cheshire, e.g. Chat Moss. This reference is probably inspired by the building of the Manchester-Liverpool railway across Chat Moss. See footnote 48 316.

charge in a 'dark overshadowed dale, where the sun seemed to set behind the hills before four o'clock on mid-summer afternoon' (*CP* 294).

Their visits to the farm are dictated partly by the progress of the line and partly by Holdsworth's relaxed attitude to the job. After Holdsworth's departure to Canada, again determined by the offer of the management of a line in the 'New World', Paul's boss was far less lenient about such visits. Socio-economic change is embodied in the coming of the railway to the rural environment of Hope Farm. Gaskell highlights its social impact as Mrs Holman remains at home during harvest time, for she thought 'Somebody must stay at home and take care of the house there were so many tramps about; if I had not had something to do with the railroad, she would have called them 'navvies' (*CP* 268).

The railway created irrevocable change in Phillis' life, whatever idealistic view she may have held at the end of the story.

> Phillis asked me, when we were alone, if I thought my father would allow her to go and stay with them for a couple of months. She blushed a little as she faltered out her wish for a change of thought and scene.
> 'Only for a short time, Paul. Then - we will go back to the peace of the old days. I know we shall; I can, and I will!' (*CP* 354)

Gaskell apparently leaves the reader with the image of a woman who is unable to recognise the realities of change. However, what appears as the ending of *Cousin Phillis* in published form was not the intended finale. Her preferred plan was that Phillis would embrace and adopt technological change and live by reclaiming her land to increase production whilst adopting children. This scenario is consistent with the 'hard pastoral' of the Hope Farm economy, and it takes Gaskell one stage beyond her belief in environmental determinism and is entirely consistent with the philosophy she has expounded in her previous fiction. For she recognises the empowering consequences of socio-economic change, in that Phillis is able to control and determine a destiny in which 'nurture' and surroundings are only one controlling factor in the equation of human destiny. However, editorial dictate prevented Gaskell from concluding the story with its natural progression, so she dashed off a 'make-do

conclusion'[200] which is not entirely consistent with her philosophy either in this novel or in her other writings.

It is interesting to note that the narrative drive of the two works written before *Wives and Daughters* is engendered by the railway, that technological innovation which revolutionised time-distance in this country.[201] To a woman who loved to travel, visit friends and family, and experience both new and familiar places, the railway must have been a god-send because it opened up the country to her and facilitated her phases of travelling. Always panicky about catching trains, she spent hours pouring over Bradshaw's railway guides as she worked out routes, times and connections. Nevertheless, however motivated she was by this socio-economic change, paradoxically, it was the pre-railway countryside of her childhood to which she returned for the location of what was to be 'her crowning glory' and final novel.

CONCLUSION

Gaskell used the accumulated experience of her early years spent in rural Warwickshire and Cheshire as the inspiration for her final novel and several shorter pieces of fiction. Although modelled on reality the rural landscapes and provincial townscapes are fictional. However, interspersed throughout these works real places appear which are larger, more urbanised and/or beyond English shores. For instance, London, Rome, and Africa. Although the characters may travel to those places, the narrative does not (with the exception of Rome in *A Dark Night's Work*). Instead the narrative lens remains firmly and narrowly fixed on provincial England.

In *Wives and Daughters* and *Cousin Phillis* especially, the authorial process of 'creative recollection' is at work throughout selecting, manipulating and amalgamating the real topographies of Warwickshire and Cheshire to create a unique and

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[200] Uglow 551.

[201] Gaskell, in her rural novels, is concerned with the movement of the middle classes who had the means to travel by coach, whereas in *Mary Barton,* Mary was able to travel to Liverpool to assist Jem *because* the railway had made such long distance travel available to the working classes. On the contrary, Bell Robson did not travel to York Assizes because of the distance, the moorland barrier and because the working classes were not a mobile section of the population at the end of the eighteenth century.

recognisable, if not mappable, topography. By collecting and collating the clues scattered but woven into its fabric, the novel's topography can be rendered securely realistic and thematically important. All the 'Knutsford-based' work is 'narrated from deep within her experience' of rural and provincial life and in *Wives and Daughters* especially the narrative perspective is a clear indicator of this fact. The landscape is viewed through a single perceptual filter as Molly and the narrator are one. However, in spite of, or perhaps because of, her familiarity with provincial life, Gaskell, as omniscient narrator, is able to take an objective view of people and their behaviour. Her gentle ironic humour suffuses the text of her final novel as she portrays vividly the nuances of social behaviour in Hollingford.

Like the structural foundations of her previous major novels, the narrative structure of *Wives and Daughters* is founded on and shaped by place, as is demonstrated clearly in fig. 6.1. In this case there are four recognisable spheres which, although they have a spatial context and interior and exterior ground plans, are more easily defined by their social characteristics.

'Nothing much happens'[202] in Hollingford and the narrative 'potters' along at a leisurely pace driven by the day-to-day events and the rhythms of life which cause the characters to move between the socio-spatial spheres of 'the great house'; the squire's home, the doctor's house and the town itself. Thus the story is 'shaped from within' by the provincial life of Hollingford. As a result the novel has that 'never-ending' quality of *Framley Parsonage*, so loved by Gaskell. Gradually and unobtrusively, change is woven into the picture. The Squire and the aristocrat reclaim their unproductive land, and three of the characters become engrossed in the scientific revolution which is occurring beyond Hollingford.

In contrast, the narrative drive of *A Dark Night's Work* and *Cousin Phillis* is engendered by a national major socio-economic change, although little is seen of the impact of the railway beyond the immediate locality of these stories. The focus

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[202] Hornback 128.

remains largely within the small town environment, as Gaskell's concerns lie with the destinies of her characters.

As has been discussed, in these two shorter pieces of fiction, the destinies of the two female protagonists are intimately connected to their environment via the coming of the railway, However, to some extent the determinants of human destiny change in her final novel. Whereas the destinies of earlier characters were determined by the physical conditions in Manchester and Eccleston; the physical topography of Wales; or the location in time and space of Monkshaven; 'most of the characters' in *Wives and Daughters* 'fall victim to chance.'[203] Whilst reference has been made to 'chance' factors during the course of discussion, there are numerous further examples which could be used to illustrate Gaskell's authorial intervention that: 'fate is a cunning hussy'(*WD* 75). However, the novel would not be so firmly rooted in a vividly realised, functioning environment if she had forsaken her belief in the inextricable link between human beings and their environment. More than that, though, Gaskell has not forsaken the deterministic philosophy which underpinned the earlier phases of her work. Whilst it may be argued that small town and countryside are 'living' rather than determining environments, the contrary viewpoint has been advanced in this chapter. Those who hale from outside are unable to adapt and survive (just like their counterparts in Manchester), whereas those who originate in Hollingford adapt, change and survive. Their adaptability enables them to arbitrate their own destinies from within the moral and ethical codes derived from the social confines of small town provincialism.[204]

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[203] Morris, introduction, xi.

[204] D'Albertis 158. Like other contemporary critics read *Wives and Daughters* as a 'post-Darwinian novel' in which the underpinning structure and philosophy is derived from his theory. She hypothesises that the novel 'structurally imitates Darwinian investigative methodology in the fashioning of its plots.' D'Albertis 138. It seems to this author that although a perfectly valid reading which can be substantiated from the text, it intellectualises Gaskell's intentions. Whilst she would have been familiar with Darwin's ideas, indeed as has been shown concepts of adaptation, and the survival of the fittest appear in her early novels, after *Sylvia's Lovers* she wanted to recollect and write in tranquillity about those places with which she was intimately familiar.

Of course, generalisations highlight exceptions. For instance, Osborne rejected his heritage which determined that he would inherit the estate. However, congenital heart disease proved fatal and ironically prevented him from being the arbitrator of his own fate.

Although it may seem that the topography was less precise, the narrative less driven by the place, and the philosophy less deterministic in *Wives and Daughters* than in her previous work, place remains the central principle around which the works are organised and unified.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

A 'northern' novelist

Gaskell's locations are both real and imagined, topographically secure and/or amalgamations and manipulations of topographies that have been derived from recollected experience. Although there is a preponderance of northern localities amongst her places, the geographical distribution is surprisingly wide, extending across England and Wales to beyond these shores. This distribution which is mapped in fig.7.1 shows blank areas in Scotland and Ireland, areas which had been commandeered by Scott and Edgeworth before Gaskell started writing. The south-west of England is another blank and if, as has been assumed, the 'eastern counties of England' was no more than a smokescreen for the location of Fordham in *Ruth,* East Anglia is almost blank too.[1] The geographical focus of Gaskell's writings follow a major axial belt from Silverdale in the north-west through Manchester, Cheshire, the middle of England of Warwickshire to Birmingham, and on to London, Winchester and the south coast. However, both west and east are also represented in the North Wales of *Ruth* and the Monkshaven of *Sylvia's Lovers.*

Although it may appear that Gaskell throws her geographical net wide, in fact the greatest proportion of the writings discussed in this thesis are located in the north, some more obviously so than others. The 'industrial novels' of *Mary Barton* and *North and South* are regionally secure and by definition 'northern', as industrialisation and concomitant urbanisation was a feature of northern England.

With the exception of Dartmoor, Exmoor and Bodmin Moor, wild moorlands characterise the resistant geology found in the north and west of Britain. Therefore it can be assumed that the works of the middle phase, all of which contain moorlands, are firmly, if not exclusively, located in the north. The narrative of *Ruth* appears more

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[1] Cromer appears briefly in *North and South* as an out-of-town venue for the Lennox family.

Mary Barton
Manchester and Liverpool

North and South
Milton-Northern; Oxford;
Helstone and London

Ruth
Abermouth; Ffestiniog
Fordham and Eccleston

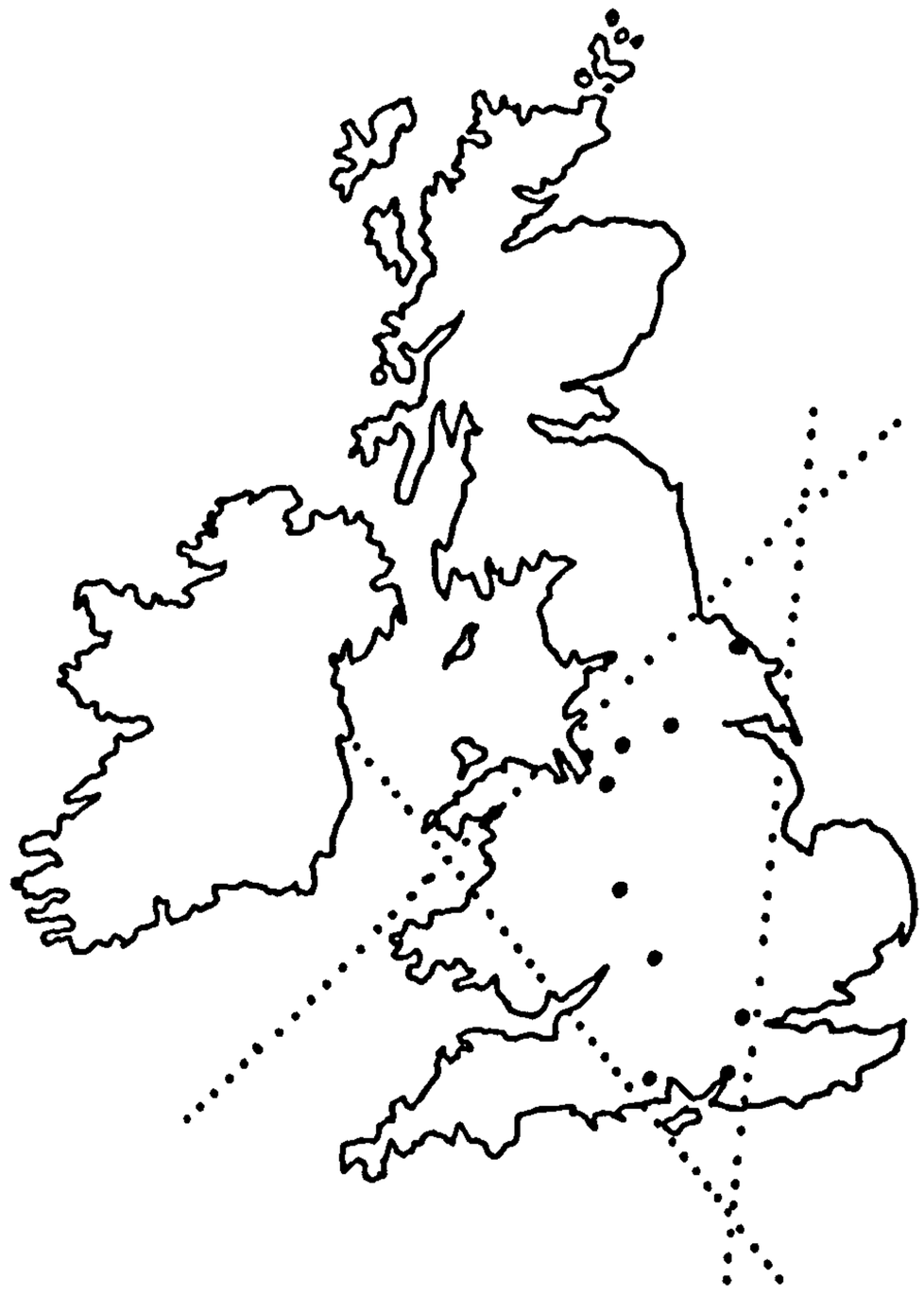
Sylvia's Lovers
Monkshaven; London and
Portsmouth

Fig. 7.1 The Spatial Distribution of Gaskell's Writing

The Life of Charlotte Brontë
Haworth

The Knutsford-based novels
Cranford; Mr H; ADNW.

Wives and Daughters
My Lady Ludlow
Hollingford and *Hanbury Court*



The Complete Map of Gaskell's Writing

Fig. 7.1 (cont) The Spatial Distribution of Gaskell's Writing

scattered, and located less obviously in the north, than *The Life* and *Sylvia's Lovers.* However, provided the argument is founded upon the assumption that Fordham is inspired by Knutsford, Eccleston by Macclesfield and Abermouth by Silverdale, it is clearly a 'northern ' novel. Therefore it can be concluded that the 'wildscape' phase of Gaskell's writing is also predominantly 'northern'.

In the final phase of her writing Gaskell's narrative lens focuses on rural landscapes and provincial townscapes, all of which are fictional. Consequently regional security poses more of a problem. There are clues in the fiction sometimes through a scattering of real places, like Warwickshire in *My Lady Ludlow*, the Malverns in *Wives and Daughters* and references to the 'north' in *Cousin Phillis* and 'north country people' in *Wives and Daughters*. Whilst it has been argued that *Wives and Daughters* and *My Lady Ludlow* are located in the Midlands, the inspiration was derived in part from her knowledge of Cheshire, whereas *Cranford, Cousin Phillis, A Dark Night's Work* and *Mr Harrison's Confessions* are Knutsford and Cheshire-based. The 'northern' location of this phase is much less overt for two reasons. First, Gaskell was evoking what was an enclosed, quintessentially English landscape across which are dotted farms, villages and small towns. Such landscapes are sufficiently far removed from the metropolis or any urban centre to be termed 'provincial.' As both the Cheshire and Midlands Plains are underlain by the same geology, the landscapes are remarkably similar. Therefore amalgamating the experiences of her early years in Warwickshire and Cheshire did not pose a problem of regional identity. Secondly, Gaskell distinguished between northern provincial locations which were predominantly middle-class environments and her northern industrial novels, one of which focused almost exclusively on the working classes. However, differences between provincial and industrial environments are evident not only via physical and socio-economic environments but also via non-spatial indices notably dialect, food and clothing. Brief reference to such indices has served to endorse the 'northern-ness' of much of her writing.

A novelist of place and the equation of human destiny

John Chapple states unequivocally that: 'Places always affected Elizabeth Gaskell', a view endorsed by Gérin and further underpinned by the findings of this thesis.[2] Therefore it can be no surprise to discover that 92 % of all Gaskell's writings and 90% of those discussed in these pages introduce the location of the story on the first page, if not within the first paragraph.[3]

It has been argued in these pages that Gaskell's' work is underpinned by a belief in the intimate connection between human beings and their local environment,[4] a philosophy which provides the unifying principle for a writer whose land- and town- scapes were diverse. Consideration of the underpinning philosophy during the course of the argument has revealed that it is possible to recognise a progression in the expression of that philosophy during the course of her writing career. Gaskell recognised that human destiny is the result of the interaction of a number of contributory factors, the balance of which changed according to the environment in which her characters were living. The physical conditions of rural and provincial landscapes may constrain and determine less than those located in moorlands, on seaboards and in industrial areas.

However it has been concluded here that there is a strain of environmental

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[2] J.A.V. Chapple, *Elizabeth Gaskell: A Portrait in Letters* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1980) 17. Winifred Gérin, *Elizabeth Gaskell: A Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976) 29.

[3] These figures are derived from a survey of all the works published by Oxford University Press in their World Classics series. Very few stories are omitted from this edition. Therefore it is a secure base from which to work. *The Sexton's Hero, Mr Harrison's Confessions* and *My Lady Ludlow* are those which do not have a specific locale at the beginning. Unusually she begins to weave the tale around the characters before she introduces the place. However, this is not a denial of the narrative significance of the location. For instance, the realities of the shifting sands of the Kent Estuary and the role of the physical environment in determining destiny dominate the narrative of *The Sexton's Hero.*

[4] Interestingly writers of the time take a similar view. Jane Austen has already been quoted as a writer who thought that a village with a small number of families was an ideal socio-spatial unit. George Eliot writes in *Daniel Deronda:* 'A human life, I think, should be rooted in some spot of native land.' George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967) and the reader is never left in any doubt in Dickens' novels as to location whether real or fictional. Many commentators have acknowledged the connection between place and character. Laurence Lerner, introduction, Wives *and Daughters* by Elizabeth Gaskell (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969) 26; Alan Shelston, '*Ruth:* Mrs Gaskell's Neglected Novel' *Bulletin of John Rylands Library* 58 (1975-6): 188; Angus Easson, introduction *Wives and Daughters* by Elizabeth Gaskell (Oxford: Oxford UP, xvii; Angus Easson 'Elizabeth Gaskell and the Novel of Local Pride' *Bulletin of John Rylands Library* 67 (1984-5) 701. It is ironic that, given the greater stress on chance and circumstance in *Wives and Daughters*, it is in the context of this novel that critics mention determinism.

determinism running through the whole of her work, irrespective of phase or genre of writing.

Both the socio-economic conditions of Manchester in the 1840's and Monkshaven in the 1790's have been shown to play a large part in controlling human destiny. The working classes, subject to the vagaries of cotton trading and the inevitability of mill fires, succumbed to the exigencies of redundancy, squalor and prostitution. The rhythms of life in a busy whaling port and the external pressures of a continental war directly and indirectly determined the fate of several characters, namely Philip, Kinraid and Sylvia.

The natural environments of mountain-moor and sea dominate the middle phase of her writing. All three are used deterministically, romantically and to create dramatic tension but in different measures according to the work. There are scenes in the mountains of North Wales in *Ruth* and in the littoral zone of Monkshaven in *Sylvia's Lovers* that are notable for their detailed knowledge of the physical landscape and the way in which it is utilised to create dramatic tension and determine destiny. At the same time the concept of 'wildscape' pervades the narratives of both the fiction and the non-fiction of this phase. Whilst the realistic manifestation of 'wildscape' appears throughout, some literary significance lies in its symbolic role. Moorland and sea are closely correlated with the extremities of the emotional spectrum in all three works. This 'romantic' approach to landscape is considered by Shelston to 'convince in a way which is rare in the whole range of Victorian fiction',[5] an opinion which, it is hoped, has been underscored in this thesis. It is this author's opinion that Gaskell's technique of using the intricacies of local topography to create dramatic tension and narrative turning points is unique amongst her contemporaries and one of the highlights of her writing. The perceived realities of 'illimitable' moorland and sea are masterly in the way that they evoke a 'sense of place' whilst also representing the emotional status of a particular character. Both approaches, deterministic realism and romantic

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[5] Shelston, '*Ruth*: Mrs Gaskell's Neglected Novel' 188.

representation, are integral to the underpinning philosophy as they link, inextricably, character to environment, proving that place is an organisational and unifying principle.

However, although the deterministic theme is dominant and pervasive in the first two phases she does not suggest that there is anything inevitable what happens to the characters who inhabit any of these places. Throughout her writing, Gaskell often tempers her view of environmental determinism by demonstrating the role of character as a factor in the equation. John Barton and Daniel Robson play a significant role in determining their own destinies because they felt a strong sense of injustice about events surrounding them. Embitterment, aggression and a determination to fight for their cause engendered their actions and determined their fates.

Even in the early phases of her writing Gaskell recognises that to some extent life is a 'lottery', especially for the workers who surround her in Manchester. Therefore when Barton picks the 'chance' card to become the agent of Harry Carson's murder he is exemplifying yet another factor in the equation of human destiny.

Interestingly, in several of the works set in the more deterministic environments, the equation is pervaded by the theme of expiation, so that the ultimate destiny of Barton, Ruth and Robson is determined by yet another factor. This demonstrates what Gallagher sees as the tension between 'social determinism and tragic heroism.'[6] In the case of Barton and Ruth this theme is woven into their physical environment both realistically and symbolically, as Carson's revelation occurs on the streets of Manchester and Philip dies having rescued Bella from the sea.

In her final work, Gaskell states that 'fate is a cunning hussy' (*WD* 75) and so it would seem that the serendipity of life largely, but not wholly, determines what happens to the characters. Although current interpretations of *Wives and Daughters* like to

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[6] Catherine Gallagher, *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1988) 74.

highlight the 'many seemingly arbitrary circumstances' [7] which determine destinies, chance encounters that trigger a series of causal links do not deny a sense of determinism about the provincial environment. This is because these chance factors occur within a distinctive social context which itself plays a part in determining destiny. It was the contribution of confines of genteel society, a well established social hierarchy with its associated codes of behaviour and social mores that partly determined what happened to Molly during the course of the story. At the same time, her innate integrity enabled her to keep secrets and eventually to find happiness. In the chapter dealing with rural and provincial environments, it was shown that woven into the narrative of *Wives and Daughters* in particular, is the fine balance of the factors of chance, character and environment.

The deterministic theme has also been shown to remain throughout this last phase of her writing, most noticeably in *Cousin Phillis* and *A Dark Night's Work.* Socio-economic change in the form of the railway plays a major role in the lives of the characters in these two novellas. However Gaskell demonstrates, too, that the equation can be reversed so that human beings can utilise changing technology to determine their own destinies. Interwoven into life on the country estates are the land reclamation schemes introduced by Squire Hamley and Lord Cumnor in order to maintain their sources of income. These schemes, whilst highlighting the Squire's intransigence to change, can be seen to be another example of Gaskell's demonstration of the ability of human beings to adapt to rather than be determined by their environment.

The concepts of adaptation and survival are integral to the underlying philosophy and examples abound in Gaskell's work.[8] 'Outsiders' may fail to adapt and survive, although the rule is not universal. Ben Davenport is typical of the fatalist, who, having succumbed to typhus, dies in his squalid cellar, whilst his wife refuses to bow

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[7] Pam Morris, ed. *Wives and Daughters* by Elizabeth Gaskell (London: Penguin, 1996) xi.

[8] Gaskell includes these ideas at the outset of her writing before Darwin proposed his laws of nature in *The Origin of Species* (1859).

to the inevitable but triumphs over adversity to earn a living. On the other hand, neither Mr Hale nor his wife survive their move to the north, whereas Margaret thrives in Milton-Northern due to her receptivity to new ideas and an innate integrity and concern for others learnt amongst the forest poor of Helstone. Cynthia and Mrs Hamley cannot adapt to life in Hollingford: one departs and the other dies. Hyacinth Kirkpatrick copes, not like Jane Davenport through innate determination, but by changing her physical surroundings and daily routines. Ironically however, it is Mr Gibson who demonstrates the greatest ability to adapt to a new way of life. Within the same environment he accommodates his new wife and accepts a new way of life whilst pursuing his own interests.

The structural foundations of Gaskell's work

Given that Gaskell almost always began her stories in a particular place, which is often familiar, often in the north of England, and, given that her work is underpinned by human-environment linkages, it is to be expected that place is central to the literary aspect of her work as well. Moretti's model of narrative structure was adapted to each of Gaskell's major novels to test its applicability and draw conclusions about the role of place in their narrative structures. In each case the test proved successful, and as the diagrams for each major novel demonstrate, places provide their structural foundations. Comparisons of these narrative structures highlight a number of points about her work.

First; some narratives are principally nodal as they are focused largely or exclusively upon one location. The structural units of these narratives are the homes of the characters. The first and last novels are the best examples of that structure. However their polarity is not only evident in their position in her writing career but also in terms of the contrast in the environments themselves. Physically and socially, Manchester's real industrial environment could not be more different from fictional provincial Hollingford.

Secondly, although it has a northern industrial and commercial focus, the spatial organisation of Mary *Barton* is the most complex of all her novels. This is the result

of the dynamic change that Manchester was undergoing in the 1840's. 'Half-finished streets' encroaching upon the rural periphery are the spatial manifestation of rapid urbanisation and have a realistic and symbolic use in the text as sites of dramatic tension. This physical periphery is balanced by a social periphery and the 'geographical marginalisation'[9] of Esther. In addition, there are several homes that form interactive spheres linked by the relationships between the characters and their movements around the town. In her final novel, Gaskell's narrative lens is focused on the upper echelons of society and their homes. The topology of the town is less complex, as befits a socially and physically confined place in which most of the change occurs beyond the town and any change within is gradual.

Thirdly, sandwiched between the first and last novels are works that have a wider geographical distribution and diverse natural and human landscapes. This is particularly true of *Ruth* and *North and South.* The latter incorporates the polarity of rural 'south' and industrial 'north', whereas the narrative of *Ruth* moves through four contrasting physical and social landscapes. It has been shown that throughout her work these contrasting landscapes interact and are interlinked by characters who inhabit and move within and between them. Character movement generates narrative drive and permits variations of narrative pace. Authorial control increases but authorial intervention decreases during the course of her writing. Therefore whilst character movement through the streets of Manchester controls the narrative dynamic of *Mary Barton,* this technique is continued more spasmodically as her career advances. In her final novel, although the reader follows Mr Gibson and Molly in the first part of the story, the former gradually fades out as Cynthia arrives and the narrator takes greater control. To a large extent the topology of Gaskell's novels is focused on the protagonist in order to maintain spatial continuity. Only when the protagonist moves does the narrative follow. For instance, although John Barton moves around the country and many characters in *Wives and Daughters* make the

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[9] Deirdre D'Albertis, *Dissembling Fictions: Elizabeth Gaskell and the Victorian Social Text* (Macmillan: Basingstoke and London, 1997) 68.

journey to London, the narratives remain fixed in Manchester and Hollingford. Molly never leaves Hollingford whereas, when Mary goes to Liverpool, the narrative goes too. However, there are occasions when other characters generate the narrative dynamic for strategic or thematic reasons: for instance, Mr Hale's visit to Mr Bell in Oxford in *North and South.* At times the author takes control so that the narrative moves independently of character. The reader does not follow Ruth's journey to Abermouth. However, this is an apparent rather than a real spatial gap in the narrative and in no way compares with the spatial discontinuity that occurs earlier in this narrative. A chasm opens up as London fails to appear despite the expectation set up in the reader. As has been discussed, Gaskell used London as a metaphor not a reality. It was part of her structural design and by far the most effective method of portraying the metropolis. Often controlled by the movement of the characters, the narrative pace varies, and narrative pauses may be filled by authorial intervention that, in the case of *Mary Barton*, may be didactic in tone and informative in substance or may illuminate a character. By the time Gaskell wrote *North and South,* the didacticism was replaced by a more balanced view of the case of master versus worker which is interwoven into the narrative via dialogue between the various parties. Didacticism fades as her later work focuses upon familiar places and socio-economic change like the advent of the railway, and land improvement was more universally understood than the squalor of working class Manchester.

Fourthly, as didacticism fades and Gaskell moves into the middle, 'wildscape' phase of her career, the landscapes become romanticised and representative. Unenclosed moorlands and seascapes are invested with the feelings of the characters as they represent the extremes of the emotional spectrum in *Ruth, The Life* and *Sylvia's Lovers.* These wildscapes contrast markedly with the 'enclosed intimacy' and genteel demeanour of the inhabitants of her provincial townscapes whose emotions are usually suppressed. The one exception is the chance encounter between Molly, Cynthia, and Preston on Croston Heath. An anomaly within an otherwise enclosed

landscape, the unenclosed common symbolises the secret passion Preston feels for Cynthia.

Fifthly, any generalisations about the spatial manifestations of the novels' resolutions must be seen in the context of the individual work and the complexities of the equation of human destiny. However with that proviso, some conclusions can be drawn. Ruth and Charlotte die, Mary and Sylvia emigrate, their destinies largely determined by the physical and social constraints of industrial environments and 'wildscape'. On the contrary, Margaret and John demonstrate the alternative solution to *Mary Barton's* Manchester and remain in the centre of Milton-Northern united and reconciled to their environment. Molly and Phillis adapt to socio-economic change and demonstrate self-determination despite the physically and socially constrained provincialism in which they have been brought up.

Finally, Gaskell's narratives are located in places she knew or with which she became familiar. Only once does a narrative stray into uncharted territory. Ironically, the scene at Acre in *Sylvia's Lovers* has been flagged up by critics as an example of her failure to evoke a realistic environment integral to the narrative. The lack of integration originates in the narrative chasm that opens up, as the reader has to take an imaginative leap similar to that in *Ruth.* In *Sylvia's Lovers,* though, there is no intervening location, however invisible. She was undoubtedly wise not to allow the narrative to follow Roger to Africa.

In conclusion: The arguments advanced in these pages endorse and underline Marroni's thesis that Gaskell's novels are topological: that is, that they are designed, organised and structured on place.

Topographical Security and Realism

The discussions have shown that Gaskell rarely replicated a landscape but used familiar and less familiar places as an inspirational springboard for her writing. The argument made in these pages offers the thesis that Gaskell adopted an identifiable method when she constructed real and fictional landscapes, geographies, topographies and townscapes. This method, which I have termed 'creative recollection', involves

the separate but inter-related processes of 'selection', 'amalgamation' and 'manipulation'. I have argued that these processes are used by Gaskell to create an imaginative and unique topography for her artistic purposes. The outstanding example of this methodology can be found in *Wives and Daughters,* a 'Knutsford-based' novel in which Hollingford is topographically secure in the Midlands. Gaskell wanted the town both realistically and symbolically located in the spatial heart of England.

This thesis has attempted to counteract the notion that Gaskell appeared to make modifications or even mistakes that imply a lack of spatial awareness.For instance, if she telescoped distances in *Ruth,* it was for dramatic effect, and the distances mattered less than the symbolism of the mountains and moorlands. Her incorrect geographical orientation of the Yorkshire coast in *Sylvia's Lovers* was excusable, given that she did not have access to a map when she was in Whitby and given the way maps of Whitby were oriented in the documented sources she would have used for her research.

Gaskell has been shown to be selective in her use of inspirational material. For instance, only the southern rural periphery, south-east and eastern sectors of Manchester are realised in *Mary Barton.* The centre is a blank on the map. Her provincial towns have no industry or urban poor. However, of all the places which feature in her work, the best example of selectivity can be found in the portrait of Haworth; but the responsibility for this lies not so much with the author but the subject. Gaskell's perceptual filter of unfamiliarity with the village and its environs was a factor, but controlling the picture was Charlotte. Her writing, which endowed Gaskell's preconceptions with unrepresentative expectations of a bleak, isolated, remote, moorland village, together with the likely manipulation of Gaskell's visit in 1853, produced a map and picture of Haworth which may be distorted but is not inappropriate. Gaskell wanted to tell the truth, and her evocation of Haworth was the truth as she and Charlotte perceived it.

Whilst it has been possible to produce maps to depict the geography and topography of some of her work, the provincial towns have defied such efforts. Fictionalised and,

without the three addresses I have argued are necessary to produce a map, the narrative structure of the Knutsford-based novels tends to focus on their social geography rather than offering mappable space.

Finally, although intensely realised and topographically secure, Gaskell's landscapes and places are overlain by symbolism and may be perceived through filters of both author and character. The portrait of Haworth is only one example of perceived reality. Gaskell's unfamiliarity and fascination with the illimitable horizons of the featureless treelessness of the Haworth moors pervaded not only the biography but characterised the fiction of the middle phase of her writing. Whilst broadly accurate, this generalisation about the moors must be qualified in two counts in the light of the findings. First, there is a fundamental difference in landscape between the moorlands of North Wales, which are integral to a picturesque landscape, and the unrelieved tracts West Yorkshire where there is nothing but moorland. Secondly, in the biography the moors were depicted in bloom more often than not. However, that does not mean that it is a myth that they were bleak and 'wild' for those epithets were used on many occasions to represent the subject's rather than the author's perception.

In the middle phase the sea was added as a 'wildscape.' Essentially symbolic, its calm tranquil appearance belied its reality, for to those on land it brought untold tragedy. In *North and South,* Milton-Northern is perceived through the filters of 'insiders' and 'outsiders' whereas, in her final novel, author and character are inseparable as Molly views the landscape of Hollingford. However another dimension of perceived reality has been revealed in these pages. Gaskell also demonstrates that perceived reality may change according to emotional status. Ruth's perception of the mountain environment shifts according to events whereas Molly's view of Hollingford remains constant despite a shift in her feelings from happiness to disappointment. Gaskell clearly wanted to contrast the continuity of provincial environments against the transient perception of the mountains where 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder'.[10]

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[10] The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations lists the source as a 'mid-18c proverb'. *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* ed. Elizabeth Knowles 5th ed. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999) 595:38. This ties

From the evidence in her writing, it seems that the grandeur and illimitability of natural landscapes do not evoke the consistency of emotional response which is characteristic of rural-provincial landscapes. The contrast originates from 'deep within her own experience'[11] and adds to the rich topographical tapestry of her writing. On the whole Gaskell was thoughtful and deliberate in the way she presented places and the detailed analysis in these pages has shown that: (a) her topography is less 'vague'[12] than might at first appear; (b) her landscapes and places are topographically secure; (c) narrative structure is founded on physical and socio-economic environments and, (d) the places are woven into the narrative fabric through the underpinning philosophy of the intimate association between character and place. Gaskell wove her stories into and around the contrasting landscapes of the 'half-finished streets' of a rapidly growing industrial town, the 'illimitable horizons' of moor and seascapes, and finally into the enclosed intimacy of a quintessentially rural, provincial, English landscape, so that they were inextricably linked to them.

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in well with the landscape aesthetic movement in which landscapes were classified as 'Beautiful,' 'Sublime' and 'Picturesque'.

[11] Peter Preston, 'Manchester and Milton-Northern: Elizabeth Gaskell and the Industrial Town' *Writing the City Eden, Babylon and the New Jerusalem* ed. Peter Preston and Paul Simpson-Housley (London: Routledge, 1994) 35. As has been shown she loved Knutsford constantly and continuously throughout her life whereas Ffestiniog was associated with the death of her son.

[12] Angus Easson, 'Noah's Arks and Birds' Nests: Domestic Space in *Ruth*,' The Victorians at Leisure , Gaskell Society Conference, Chester College, 9 Aug. 1997. Unpublished paper 14.

APPENDIX I Working Class Interiors in *Mary Barton*

Gaskell	Reach
The room was tolerably large, and possessed many conveniences. On the right of the door, as you entered, was a longish window with a broad ledge. On each side of this hung *blue-and-check curtains* which were now drawn. *Two geraniums, unpruned and leafy, stood on the sill.* In the corner between the window and the fire-side was *a cupboard, apparently full of plates and dishes, cups and saucers* and some more non-descript articles for which one would have fancied their possessors could find no use-such as triangular pieces of glass to save carving knives and forks from dirtying table-cloths. However, it was evident that *Mrs Barton was proud of her crockery and glass for she left her cupboard door open,* with a glance round of satisfaction and pleasure. On the opposite side to the door and window was the staircase, and two doors, *one of which led to a sort of little back kitchen where dirty work such as washing up dishes might be done* and whose shelves served as a larder, and pantry and storeroom and all. The other door which was considerably lower opened into a coal-hole- the slanting closet under the stairs from which, to the fireplace, there was a gay coloured piece of oil-cloth laid. The place seemed almost crammed with furniture (sure sign of good times in the mills). Beneath the window was a dresser with three deep drawers. Opposite the fire-place was *a table which I should call a Pembroke, only it was made of deal* and I cannot tell how far a such a name can be applied to such humble material. On it, resting against the wall, was a *bright green japanned tea-tray* having a couple of scarlet lovers embracing in the middle. *The firelight danced merrily on this.* It was in some measure propped up by a crimson tea-caddy, also of japan ware. A round table on one branching leg really for use stood in the corresponding corner to the cupboard, and, if you can picture all this, you can form some idea of John Barton's home'.	In the majority of streets inhabited by operatives the front room on the ground floor is used as both parlour and kitchen. Sometimes *a second room of small dimensions opens back from it and it is generally littered with the coarser cooking and washing utensils.* The interiors are a series of little rooms about ten feet by eight, more or less floored with bricks or flagstones. A substantial deal table stands in the centre of each apartment and a few chairs, stools and settles to match are ranged around. *Occasionally a little table of mahogany is not wanting...* Sometimes there is *a large cupboard the open door of which reveals a shining assortment of plates and dishes* sometimes the humble dinner service is ranged on the shelves which stretch along the walls; while beneath them are suspended upon hooks a more or less elaborate series of skillets stewpans and miscellaneous cooking and household matters. A conspicuous object is very frequently *a glaringly painted and highly glazed tea-tray upon which the firelight glints cheerily* and which, but its superior lustre and artistic boldness of design, commonly throws into the shade a couple or so of tiny prints in narrow black frames which are suspended above it. A favourite and no doubt useful article of furniture is a clock [...]. Add to this catalogue..an assortment of the usual odds and ends of household matters [...] *dingy cotton curtains* and not unfrequently *a pot or two of geraniums* [...] rubbing their dry twigs and brown stunted leaves against the dim and small paned lattice. Picture all these household appliances and others of similar order, giving the room a tolerably crowded appearance and you will have a fair notice of the vast majority of the homes of the factory operatives such as they appear in the older and less improved parts of Manchester.
Source: Elizabeth Gaskell, *Mary Barton* 13-14.	Source: J. Ginswick, ed. *Labour and the Poor in England and Wales 1849-51* (London:Frank Cass, 1983) 21-22.

APPENDIX II Word counts in *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*

TABLE 1.			
SUBJECT-Moorlands	PAGE NO.	NARRATOR-EG	NARRATOR-CB
Dun and purple moors	11	*	
wild and bleak moors	11	*	
Purple moors	17	*	
out towards the heathery moors	43	*	
Glorious wild moors	43	*	
bleak country	46	*	
snow lay long and late on the moors	49	*	
Moors stretching away bleakly and barely	49	*	
tufts of heather	63	*	
Desolate snow covered moors	68	*	
Bleak wide expanse	68	*	
Purple-black moors	96	*	
the weather is cold and bleak on our moors	98	*	
Flowers brighter than the rose bloomed in the blackest of heath for her	109		*
Moors blockaded with snow	129	*	
Snow-covered moors	196	*	
Moors a great resource	216	*	
Radiant colours on the moors above	256-7	*	
Rich purple of heather bloom	257	*	
Royal ground of the moors	257	*	
Amethyst tinted hills	257	*	
Fresh fragrant scent of heather	257	*	
Little hollows and sheltered crevices with a lingering spray of heather	292	*	
Knoll of heather, branch of fern, bilberry	344		*
Bleak moors	353		*
The moors are hidden in thick fog	356	*	
Sunshine on its moors	365	*	
our moors are all white	374		*
Heathery moors in summer	379	*	
bloom of the moors-dark glow, green with young ferns	379	*	
their bloom is reserved for summer	379	*	
moors all glorious	436	*	
purple bloom of heather	436	*	
heather bloom blighted	439	*	
purple glory	439	*	
blaze of purple glory	439	*	

TABLE 2.			
SUBJECT- Epithets-Isolated, solitary, lonely	PAGE NO.	NARRATOR-EG	NARRATOR-CB
moors-grand from solitude and loneliness	11	*	
isolated hill-side life	16	*	
isolated as these hill-villages may be	21	*	
lonely houses in upland districts	21	*	
a solitary life	45	*	
Loneliest sweeps of moors	89	*	
Solitary moors	63	*	
remote Yorkshire parsonage	70	*	
life in an isolated village	72	*	
lonely country house	72	*	
Solitude and freedom of the moors	96	*	
Isolated position	98	*	
bleak solitude	109	*	
Remote English village	172	*	
Desolate Yorkshire hills	172	*	
Haworth is such a quiet lonely spot	212		*
Haworth village was wild and lonely	217	*	
solitude and isolation are oppressive circumstances	299		*
Solitude, Remembrance, Longing	312		*
the solitary days	337		*
the moors, wilderness, featureless, saddening, solitary	344		*
extreme intense solitude	353		*
solitude and isolation of my lot	360		*
deadly silence, isolation desolation were awful	360		*
solitude and isolation of my lot	360		*
her solitude	364	These last two are Jane Forster's observations about Charlotte's life	
solitude and memory	365		
to perish of inaction in stagnant solitude	387		*

TABLE 3.			
SUBJECT-Extent of the moors	PAGE NO.	NARRATOR-EG	NARRATOR-CB
rising and *sweeping* away	11	*	
all round the horizon sinuous wave-like hills	11	*	
Illimitable	11	*	
fields and moors lie *beyond*	11	*	
sweeping horizon	22	*	
village lies *embedded* in the moors	23	*	
still higher background of *sweeping* moors	33	*	
out towards the heathery moors	43	*	
sloping *upwards* behind the parsonage	43	*	
Stretching away over the moors	45	*	
loneliest *sweeps* of the moors	45	*	
Stretching moors bleakly and barely far *up* from the dwelling	49	*	
bleak wide expanse	68	*	
Sweeping surface	96	*	
Sweeping moors	117	*	
Walked *out on to* the moors	216	*	
up on the moors	257	*	
wild and open hills	257	*	
free to walk *on* the moors	344		*
the waves of the horizon	344		*
Sweeps bleak moors	353	*	
long walks *on* the moors	362	*	
moors *everywhere, beyond* and *above*	438	*	
Sweeping moors	438	*	

TABLE 4.			
SUBJECT-'Wildness'	PAGE NO.	NARRATOR-EG	NARRATOR-CB
wild bleak moors	11	*	
wild rough population	15	*	
nature of the ground was of *wild* and hilly description	18	*	
dwellers in old lonely houses have *wild* strength of will	21	*	
wild rough heathen ways	25	*	
glorious *wild* moors	43	*	
wild creatures on the moors	44	*	
his opinions-*wild* and erroneous	45	*	
wild strong hearts	61	*	
little *wild* moorland village	83		*
wild hill village of Haworth	116	*	
free *wild* untameable spirit	117	*	
wild creature	131	*	
wild romantic enthusiast	133		*
wild Yorkshire village	172		
fierce *wild* intractability of Charlotte's nature	214	*	
Haworth village was *wild* and lonely	217	*	
wild and open hills	257	*	
scenery was *wild* and chill	362	Jane Forster's comment	
the country got *wilder* and *wilder*	362	Jane Forster's comment	
high *wild* desolate moors	439	*	

APPENDIX III 'Wild' word count in *Sylvia's Lovers*

Landscape		Page Number	Location
	'heather in *wild* luxuriance'	3	Moorland hinterland
	'*wild* bleak spot'	35	Haytersbank Farm
	'*wild* fells'	389	Moorland hinterland
	'*wild* heights and moors'	390	"
	'*wild* moorland road'	469	"
	'*wild* deserted bit of garden	376	Haytersbank after the Robson's departure
Seascape			
	'*wild* excitement of the women	370	At the time of Kinraid's rescue
	'*wild* strange ocean'	102	Sea adjacent to Monkshaven
	'*wild* wide ocean'	6	
Characters			
	'*wild* north-eastern people'	7	
	'*wild* half-amphibious boys'	28	
	'*wildest* and most desperate part of the seafaring population'.	258	
	'*wild* famished eyes'	29	women on the quayside
	'enraged *wild* animal'	29	
	'*wild* gestures'	259	of women at the time of Daniel's rebellion against the press gang.
Sylvia			
	'*wild* animal'	128	The image of Sylvia as untamed
	'*wild* spirits'	130	
	'*wild* cry'	294	When Sylvia is in a highly emotional state
	'wild creature'	324	
	'wild searching gaze'	379	Sylvia when she learns of Philip's deception
	'wilder and shriller still'	379	"
Philip			
	Philip's *'wild* tones'	358	
	'*wild* prayer'	222	At the time of Kinraid's impressment
	'*wild* imagination	391	When lost on the moors in self-imposed exile

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MAPS

Manchester- Nineteenth Century Maps

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Manchester Sheet 23: *Manchester Victoria, 1849*. Sheet 24 *Manchester* (*New Cross*). Sheet 27: *New Bailey and Ordsall Lane, 1848*. Sheet 28: *Manchester City Centre, 1849*. Sheet 29: *Manchester Piccadilly: 1849*. Sheet 32: *Castlefield, 1848*. Sheet 33 *Manchester* (*Oxford Street and Gaythorn*). Sheet 34: *Manchester, London Road,*

Pigot and Slater. *General Classified and Street Directory of Manchester and Salford 1838* and *1841*. Frontispiece map. Manchester, 1838, 1841.

Other locations

Nineteenth Century Maps

One inch to one mile

Reprint of the 1st edition Ordnance Survey

Sheet 26 *Northwich and Warrington*. Newton Abbott: David and Charles

Sheet 27 *Buxton and Stockport*. Newton Abbott: David and Charles

Sheet 31 *Llangollen*. Newton Abbott: David and Charles.

Sheet LXXXI. Southampton: Ordnance Map Office, 1864

Six Inches to one mile

Sheet 18 *Lancashire*. Southampton: Ordnance Map Office 1848.

Sheet 32 *Yorkshire*. 1st edition Southampton: Ordnance Map Office 1851.

Sheet XII. NW. *Merionethshire*. Southampton: Ordnance Survey 1887.

Sheet 200 *Yorkshire*. 1st edition. Southampton: Ordnance Map Office,1851.

Twenty-five inches to one mile

Sheet XXVII.9. *Cheshire.* Southampton: Ordnance Survey 1877.

Sheet XXVIII.14. *Cheshire.* Southampton: Ordnance Map Office 1879.

Sheet XII.6. *Merionethshire.* Southampton: Ordnance Survey 1889.

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1:50,000 Landranger Series Sheet 115 *Snowdon.* Southampton: Ordnance Survey.

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1:50,000 Landranger Series Sheet 94 *Whitby.* Southampton: Ordnance Survey

London

Cross' New Plan of London, 1835. Holborn Hill: J. Cross, 1835.

Haworth

Local Board of Health, Haworth, Detail Plan. Burnley: J.O Brierley, Surveyor, 1853

Geology Map

One inch to one mile Drift Sheet 35 *Whitby and Scalby.* Southampton:Geological Survey, 1857.